Sāsanārakkha

NEWSLETTER OF SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY a special project of Taiping Insight Meditation Society ✣ RESTRICTED CIRCULATION ONLY ✣ Issue 2 ✣ August 2000 ✣

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Off To A Rousing Start

By MW Looi

The Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary, an ambitious project to establish Malaysia's first training center for Theravada Buddhist monks, got on track with the official launch of the Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Fund Raising Project at the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association on 14 May 2000. If the enthusiasm and response at the launch was anything to go by, the project looks set to be a reality in the not too distant future.

Eight-thirty in the morning and people were already trickling into the Subang Jaya Buddhist Association (SJBA) grounds for the official launch of the Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary (SBS) Fund Raising Project on 14 May 2000. A rarity in a country where Malaysian time comes into force at events, and people arrive fashionably late. But not on that particular Sunday morning. It was as if the people knew what an important occasion the morning had installed, and that they would all be part of a milestone in Malaysian Buddhism. Bhante Aggacitta envisaged the Sanctuary, and the launch of the fund raising project meant taking a big step towards making that vision a reality.

While everyone was waiting for the proceedings to start at 9.00am, the SJBA grounds was buzzing with activity as the various people involved with the launch that day were already manning booths to collect donations and sell SBS T-shirts, and ushering guests to the hall.

Just slightly after 9.00am the launch got under way. The religious patron of SBS, Chief Reverend Dr K Sri Dhammananda opened the proceedings of the morning with a short *puja*. Bro Lee Lee Kim, the Chairman of the official launch, then gave his welcoming address. Bro Lee provided a brief background of Bhante Aggacitta, and how the idea for SBS come to be after Bhante Aggacitta saw the need for a Malaysian bhikkhu training center.

Early for a big step... *Sasanarakkha* greets Ven Dr K Sri Dhammananda on his arrival for the launch.

"The establishment of an institution such as SBS is long overdue. I believe SBS can truly inspire many dedicated men to take up the noble vocation of monkhood. And in due time, these bhikkhus will emerge, suitably trained, well grounded in the Dhamma-vinaya and able to contribute to and indeed make a significant transformation of the Malaysian Buddhist scene," said Bro Lee in his speech. "In this regard, I strongly urge you to support this project wholeheartedly. Your support can be in the form of physical effort or better still financial means." He then announced that to date the total donations and pledges to the SBS fund had surpassed RM500,000 in just one and a half months. The response has been overwhelming, he said.

Bro Lee closed by saying how a lady had called him in the middle of the night to ask how she could help out in the project. "This project has unintentionally rallied and united all Buddhists in the country," he proclaimed proudly before thanking everyone for their support and help.

Ven Dhammananda was next invited to say a few words. He expressed his support for SBS and urged the people to support the project. "The time has come for us to do something or there will be no future for Buddhism in Malaysia," he remarked to the audience.

Next, who'd be better to explain the idea behind SBS than the person who envisioned it? Bhante Aggacitta took the podium to explain to the hall of nearly 400 people what SBS was all about. He started off by explaining the choice of the name Sasanarakkha

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Inspiring hope... Bro Lee giving his speech.

EDITORIAL

Calling for Helping Hands

It's never a one-man show. For anything to succeed, it takes many hands belonging to many different people. Take this newsletter for example. It was a team effort. Helpful men and women from across the country put hand to pen to paper (or in most cases these days put hand to keyboard to screen) to write the stories and articles. Then other helpful men and women edited and laid out the stories and articles into what you are reading now: *Sasanarakkha*, the newsletter for Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary.

Like the newsletter, the SBS project needs the help of many hands belonging to many people to become a reality. Since the project was launched, many hands have come forth providing help and assistance in all manners. We hope to see more helping hands being held out in the future. Mind you, we're not sitting back and waiting for people to offer their hands in support; we're actively getting people involved.

This newsletter, the various on-going projects like the road show, and planned projects like the fund raising dinner in Penang in December are all efforts to bring in many more hands to make SBS a reality. But while we are trying our best to rally the troops, we need your help as well to do the same. Hand in hand, we can work together to see our efforts bear fruit. And a very special fruit it shall be indeed.

Good wishes,

Looi Miin Wei

HANDS UP, PLEASE.

Your generosity can also be expressed in kind. We welcome these items:

- ✋ Concrete mixer (already offered by Dancan Sdn Bhd, PJ)
- ☐ 2nd hand landrover
- ☐ 2nd hand pick-up truck
- ☐ 2nd hand motorcycle — Honda 100cc
- ☐ Petrol grass cutter
- ☐ New safety boots
- ☐ New safety helmets
- ☐ Construction materials e.g. cement
- ☐ 2 metre high chain-link fencing
- ☐ New generator set / Solar Panel
- ✋ Ceramic basins and toilet bowls (already pledged by Kim Hin Industry Bhd, Kuching)

For further enquiries please call Mr Ng Kian Chong at 012-538 4026 or email <sbsmail@maxis.net.my>

We've Got Mail

from the Net

Is it only for people from Malaysia? Because I would be interested in perhaps going there when it is finished.

Erick Neiss

Our heartiest congratulations to you and the committee of SBS from Mitchell Buddhist Group (MBG), Charles Sturt University Bathurst, Australia.

This whole project caught me by surprise. I've just formed a Buddhist society at this university this summer and we're going on well with monthly Dhamma talks by invited speakers and fortnightly meditation sessions.

I'm doing my final year BA in communication (advertising) here and I'm from Kuala Lumpur. I was very much involved with the Brickfields Maha Vihara, the BMSM and the BMSM Youth Section.

We wish you and SBS committee all the very best of success, good health and long life. With your good efforts, the Buddha Sasana will definitely grow now and in the future, as we're doing the same here in Australia.

Sabbe satta sukhi hontu!

With the blessings of the Triple Gem,

Mun Yee Wong
President, Mitchell Buddhist Group

This sounds like an ambitious and wonderful project. However I could only support it if it offers women similar opportunities for spiritual development.

Good luck,

Ruth Stiles

***Ed.** One step at a time. Hope someone will be inspired to come up with a nun training centre in the future.*

With every best wish for your meritorious project.

Ian Green

Please feel free to send in your comments on our SBS project by email <sbsmail@maxis.net.my> or by post to The Editor, c/o 9 Lorong 5, Taman Bukit Mas, 34000 Taiping, Perak, Malaysia.

SBS the place to train local monks

• FROM PAGE ONE

Buddhist Sanctuary. *Sasanarakkha*, he said, could be translated to mean "Protector of the Buddha's teaching." Meanwhile, the word "sanctuary," among other things, means a sacred place—any place where refuge or protection is provided for the conservation of something original or natural. "Indeed, it is for this very purpose that SBS is envisioned—that it may help protect the original Buddha Sasana from decline in morals, learning and meditative wisdom," said Bhante Aggacitta.

He noted that since he became a monk some 20 years ago, Theravada Buddhism has developed and bloomed in Malaysia. He added that Malaysians have benefited from missionary efforts of monks from Sri Lanka, Thailand and Myanmar, and today, there is indeed great interest in the teachings of the Buddha and a fairly sizeable number of Malaysian monks.

Proclaiming the milestone... "This is the most important project in the history of Theravada Buddhism in Malaysia," said Chief Reverend.

"However, there are very few facilities for the proper training of monks in our country. So the majority leave for Thailand, Myanmar or Sri Lanka to further their studies and practice," Bhante Aggacitta said. "Speaking from experience, I must confess that it is very difficult to be new monks in a foreign land. Not only do they lack the support and fellowship of their countrymen, but they also face difficulties in language, communication, diet, health, climate and culture."

Bhante Aggacitta said the establishment of SBS would help to alleviate this difficulty by "providing facilities and resources for training our local monks in the theory and practice of Buddhism." He added, "Teaching and practical guidance will be offered in a comprehensive, holistic approach, giving a balanced emphasis on the theoretical understanding and actual practice of the monastic code, ascetic practices and meditation."

SBS will also offer an opportunity for Malaysian Buddhists to forge a Buddhist identity of their own that is unique and indigenous to our culture. "One of the priorities of SBS will be to contribute to the evolution of a modern Malaysian Theravada Buddhist identity," explained Bhante Aggacitta. "Several centuries ago, the

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ROAD SHOW RALLIES SUPPORT

Travelling to Ipoh, Penang, Alor Setar, Sitiawan, Melaka and Kuching to publicise and raise funds for SBS.

By Looi Sow Fei

In an effort to publicize and raise funds for SBS, road shows were held in several states from April to July 2000. The road show took us to Nalanda Reading Room and Archives in Ipoh (29 April), Mahindarama Temple in Penang (30 April), the residence of Mr Tan Keng Seong in Alor Star (1 May), Buddhist Meditation Society Sitiawan (1 July), Seck Kia Eenh Temple, Melaka (8 July) and Kuching Buddhist Society, Sarawak (22 July).

At all the venues the response was very heart-warming. The halls were packed and the audiences were very receptive to what they saw and heard, especially so when the slides of the SBS site were shown.

Bhante Aggacitta talked about the need for the Sanctuary, and its concept and function. Sister Lim Lay Hoon, secretary of the Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS), and Sister Looi Sow Fei, the Society's assistant secretary, complemented Bhante's presentation by explaining the financial aspects of SBS and the fund raising strategies of the project. They also stressed the need for support from the laity to raise the funds. Each session was rounded off by Sister Low Weng Kuan, the road show organiser, who expressed her appreciation for the support shown and effort put in by everyone to make the road show a success.

Be a Dhamma Protector... Ven Aggacitta urges Alor Setar Buddhists to maintain their religious heritage.

The members of the road show team, and its supporting crew from Taiping, Penang and Kuala Lumpur cooperated very well. We were able to raise over RM43,000 in donations through the road shows, which turned out to be a very productive and enjoyable experience for everyone — including Bhante Aggacitta! ✣

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Arahant Venerable Mahinda wisely said that the Sasana is not firmly established in a new land until local born sons are ordained and trained by local monks on native soil. The establishment of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary will certainly give us hope to realise this vision in our country."

Bhante Aggacitta ended by saying that with the support and contribution of the people, he had no doubt SBS would become a reality.

Finally the guest of honour, Selangor State Exco member, YB Dato' Ch'ng Toh Eng was invited to give his speech and officially launch the fund raising project. He opened by saying he had long been expecting the Buddhist community in Malaysia to initiate a project like SBS. "This is because it is of paramount importance that the Buddhist monks in Malaysia receive a proper, systematic and comprehensive training on monastic rules and etiquette that are in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha."

Dato' Ch'ng said he had three hopes for the SBS project. "First, that the project will train and develop local Buddhist monks to be knowledgeable in the teachings of the Buddha, and that they will live their monastic lives accordingly."

His second hope is for monks who graduate from the training center to help impart the teachings of the Buddha to the laity. "According to the Buddha, the Sangha's role is to show them [the lay Buddhist community] the Buddha's path by teaching them morality and wisdom, and encouraging them to live by Dhamma-centered values, thereby fostering the development of their mental faculties and spirits."

"Thirdly, I hope the project will develop into an organisation in which all Buddhist monks in Malaysia following the Theravada tradition will go through as part of their training," said Dato' Ch'ng. He also expressed hope that someday the training centre would welcome women who wished to become nuns. Dato' Ch'ng ended by wishing the project every success and officially launched the fund raising project by lighting a floating candle on the altar and striking a gong three times. A string of colourful balloons was released, springing up to form an arch behind the Buddha image. At the same time, a cluster of balloons shot up to the ceiling, raising a banner bearing the word "Sasanarakkha."

The speeches were followed by a mock cheque presentation amounting to RM57,000, which represented the donations from several Buddhist organisations throughout the country. At this point Ven Dhammananda made an unexpected announcement that the K Sri Dhammananda Trust Fund would be donating RM10,000 to the SBS project. Thunderous ovation resounded in the hall until he walked back to his seat and sat down.

Dato' Ch'ng was then invited to present souvenirs to donors who had contributed RM5,000 and above to the SBS Project fund. The launch ended with Sayadaw U Rewata, the resident monk of SJBA, chanting verses of blessings.

After this, the guests adjourned to an exhibition on the project and some light refreshments outside the hall. Quite a number bought SBS T-shirts and changed into them immediately to show their support for the worthy project. The inaugural issues of the SBS newsletter, *Sasanarakkha*, as well as the long awaited Chinese SBS brochures were also distributed.

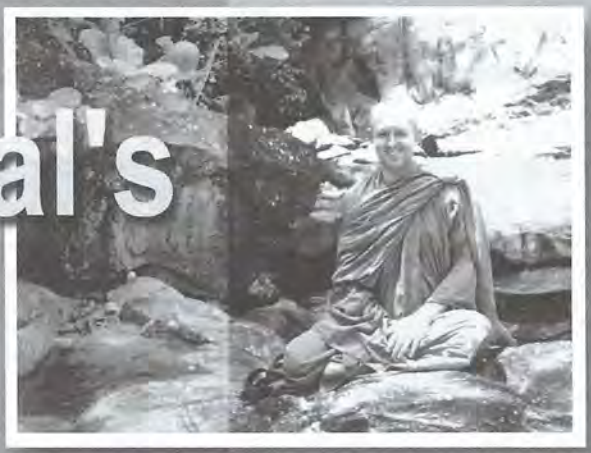
Thanks to the generosity of all those present, a total sum of RM50,510 was collected on that day itself. The launch owed its success to the efforts of the organising committee and all those who had helped in one way or another. Special credit goes to SJBA for the use of its premises and facilities to host the event. ✣

United we stand... Representatives from SBVMS, SJBA, BGF, TIMS and BWC display their collective support for the national project.

Ajahn Brahmavamso

My Multinational's New Venture

Despite the tight schedule of his recent Dhamma tour of West Malaysia from 22 May to 2 June, Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso managed to find the time to visit TIMS, Khemarama (Venerable Aggacitta's present residence) and the SBS site. In response to a request for an article, he sent this contribution from his "factory", Bodhinyana Buddhist Monastery, Serpentine, WA.



Cool and enthusiastic... The Boss enjoying the waterfall near the new branch factory.

Yesterday, a devout young Buddhist asked for my opinion on the ethics of working for a multinational company. "It depends on the individual company," I replied, adding, "I too work for one of the oldest multinationals — the International Bhikkhu Sangha — with branches all over the world!"

Thus on the first day of June this year, I was delighted to visit the site of one of my company's most exciting new ventures: SBS, the budding monks training centre in Taiping. I also have a training centre for monks here in Western Australia. I call it a monk factory, producing the priceless commodity of well-trained bhikkhus for the happiness and well being of the world. So, I was very inspired to see another monk factory established in Malaysia, showing once again the benefit of the IMF — International Monk Factories!

In Buddhism, the Sangha means monks and nuns, and only that. During the Buddha's time, when people made a confession of faith in the Triple Gem, they took refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Bhikkhu (and Bhikkhuni) Sangha. Thus there will always be a sense of something important being missing in Buddhism when there are no monks or nuns. Indeed, the Buddhist monk or nun is a living symbol of the letting go of worldly attachments so central to the timeless Dhamma of renunciation. SBS has the wonderful aim of filling this gap in the religion by training and inspiring many good monks.

As with any manufacturing enterprise, success depends on suitable location and quality control. Which is why a secluded piece of land, close to nature and largely free of external disturbance, is so essential to the process of transforming the raw materials of inspired and energetic Buddhist laymen into the final products of inspiring and energising monks who will, hopefully, become fine teachers. The process of refinement involves profound inner training in *sila*, *samadhi* and *paññā*. Every monk must have a solid foundation in *Vinaya* (monastic precepts incumbent on all monks), since it is how one behaves more than what one preaches that will give inspiration to the devotees. Then he will need the inner happiness born of deep meditative experience in order to be content with the celibacy of a monk. He will also require the wisdom born of insight, springing up from within the silence of deep concentration, to keep him detached and serene while kindly teaching in the turbulent world. It is by example that the Dhamma is best spread in the world, which is why quality control is so crucial.

I have seen the "factory" site and it is most suitable. I have met the "CEO", Ven Aggacitta, and he is most able. Now I would like to see the factory built and the production line started. Then, in a few more years, I will be delighted to see the latest model monks released into the world.

Without reservation, I encourage your financial investment in this exciting stock option. Many companies only share their profits with a small number of shareholders, but the benefits from this company will be shared to all sentient beings. What a wonderful deal! ✣

Sāsanārakkha News Team
for this issue

Editor-in-Chief *Looi Miin Wei*

Associate Editor *Ang Siew Mun*

Contributors *Ajahn Brahmavamso, Chuah Aik Sam, Doreen Lim, Lee Yu Ban, Lim Lay Hoon, Looi Miin Wei, Looi Sow Fei, Low Weng Kuan, Saccesi & Yap Siew Hong*

Photo credits *Andrew Kang, Chuah Aik Sam, Hor Tuck Loon, Lau Hui Ming, Lee Theng San, Lim Lay Hoon, Low Weng Kuan & Oo Khaik Cheang*

Layout & Design *Sukhi Hotu*

This issue of Sāsanārakkha is sponsored by the late Mdm Loh Kiew's daughter in her memory (2000 copies) and Sukhi Hotu (1000 copies).

Who's next?

Inside Out

SBS Project team-mates share their joys and sorrows at work, and thoughts on the project

Group jhana... Team-mates absorbed in preparation for the big day on its eve.

A Joyous, Memorable Event

14 May 2000, 9.10am — the launching ceremony of the Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Fund Raising Project.

In arriving at that memorable day, a lot of hard work had been put in by the organising committee. As with all work involving so many people, I knew it would not be easy.

But with each passing committee meeting, I soon learned that each person involved was committed to making the project a success. And that made things easier. The sixth and last launch committee meeting ended with everyone thanking each other, recognising what our individual strengths were, and knowing where our differences lay. We went home in high spirits with everything on schedule.

On the eve of the launching ceremony, SJBA was bustling with activity. A pool of people came from Taiping and Penang to help with the setting up. I was also amazed at the co-operative spirit of the SJBA members, who voluntarily helped in many ways, especially to put up the backdrop.

The team worked until midnight on the eve of the launch. I felt deeply grateful as I watched everyone doing things in their own peculiar ways, yet finally everything seemed to fit together in harmony. I could see in the faces of my team-mates that each and everyone was committed to give his and her best.

While working with my team-mates, I benefited tremendously by observing leadership in action. I feel many of us are great leaders created only in our own minds. In actual fact, leadership only happens on the playing field: only in action, in resolving problems and in making breakthroughs. Rough seas make rounded stones.

The launching ceremony may be over. But our work has not yet ended. It is only the beginning. We require more leaders and Buddhist workers to come forward to help us realize our vision of SBS.

Let me take this opportunity to thank all those people who have worked with me. I would like to share all the good that I have done with my teachers, with Rev Aggacitta and with all who have helped in one way or another, to make this day a fruitful, joyous and memorable one! ✣

Low Weng Kuan, *Petaling Jaya*

A Most Appropriate Gift

I believe all supporters of SBS have been presented with an excellent opportunity to offer a most appropriate gift to the Buddha Sasana.

Since Bhante Aggacitta first revealed his plans in mid-1999, countless supporters have come forward with one common goal — to make the SBS project a success. Many spontaneously pledged support and asked to be reminded for donations when fund collection commenced. Some who had donated expressed their desire to contribute again at a later date. Others wished to continue with monthly sums to help in the daily operating expenses. All in all, it is very heartening and motivating to see the beauty of the Dhamma being practised by like-minded beings.

To date, 541 official receipt books have been issued to collection centres and volunteers in Malaysia and overseas to assist in the fund raising. The "obedient" ones would hand in their collections dutifully, understanding that the land had to be paid for soon. Some would remain silent, waiting to be reminded, while others had grouses. Ninety percent of those approached showed much enthusiasm while the remaining 10% were hesitant.

I believe that helping to support this noble cause brings benefit to all beings, present and future. ✣

Doreen Lim, *Penang*

Ever new... Setting up the projector and screen at each venue is always a unique task.

We went, we asked, we got

ROAD SHOW IMPRESSIONS

A Different Kind of Wealth

Armed with our faith in the generosity of our Buddhist brothers and sisters built on the solid foundation of dana, we set about preparing our exhortation to "ask so that it shall be given." No mean task. We had a few slides and some general guidelines to work with. Mindful that we should not bore our audience by being repetitious, we had to convince them of the meritorious and noble nature of this particular act of dana.

Nevertheless after several rounds of writing, rewriting, editing and more editing, we came up with a script which we felt good about. Even then, at the eleventh hour, just before the first leg of the road show kicked off in Ipoh we had to do some final polishing and trimming, with some helpful tips from Sis Low Weng Kuan.

We asked and we were given — but the money received paled beside the wealth of experience we garnered, the close co-operation we shared and the mutual support we gave and took. It is this wealth that we must continue to accumulate for the sake of SBS. ✣

Looi Sow Fei, *Taiping*

The Play of Plays

In some ways, the road show to promote SBS was reminiscent of a school play I helped to stage before. One difference was this time around I not only had to work behind the scenes but had a supporting role to play on stage. I was one of the two presenters who talked about the financial aspect of the project.

The fun part of the experience was in the preparation stage, especially in setting up the stage for the show. As the team involved working people from different states who could only come together on the day of the road show, we ended up facing unforeseen hitches. Rather than press the panic button, we made use of the situation to showcase our creative, last minute improvisations. Of course it helped a lot to have an efficient and talented "director" — none other than Ven Aggacitta himself — to oversee to every detail. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly in the process.

Surprisingly, the stage fright I expected dissipated as soon as I faced the audience. I'd attribute this to the audience themselves. At all the venues, what greeted us were people with eager eyes, perked ears and curious expressions. They were people who went to the road show with sincere interest. So, half the battle was already won, as they were very focussed and receptive.

When the curtains came down and the cast went back to their makeshift homes for those few nights, it reminded me of the Chinese opera troupes I used to observe with fascination as a child. Tired but happy for having performed satisfactorily, we retired looking forward to the next episode. See you next, Sarawak! ✣

Lim Lay Hoon, *Taiping*

No Stones Unturned For A Jolly Good Show

A great deal of effort and time was spent in the planning of the road show.

Every member of the team worked diligently to ensure the best performance was delivered at each venue. The slides were checked, re-checked and re-arranged to perfection. Trying to get the best and biggest screen, and to get the best quality picture from the slides was quite a challenge and proved to be a lot of fun. Creative juices flowed and every resource available was put to good use. We turned chairs and tables upside down. Table cloths, clothes pegs and *mahjong* paper, to name a few, were put to good use. It was a real test of our creativity and innovation but it was accompanied by much fun and laughter.

Generally, there was a lot of enthusiasm, effort, sweat and teamwork during the road show. All these, combined with a moderate amount of patience and a pinch of frustration at certain moments, provided a great deal of joy for all of us. ✣

Yap Sew Hong, *Petaling Jaya*

Two Wings of A Bird

By Ang Siew Mun

"Householders and homeless alike,
Each a support for the other,
Both accomplish the true Dhamma –
The unsurpassed security from bondage."

~ ITIVUTTAKA 107

The above verse encapsulates the spirit of why lay people should support SBS, a monks training centre to be set up in Taiping.

The secretary of the Taiping Insight Meditation Society (TIMS), Sis Lim Lay Hoon, when presenting the financial aspects of the SBS project during the road show, likened the support of the lay people for this project to "two wings of a bird." A bird needs two wings to flap and fly. So too, the strength of the Buddha Sasana depends on the commitment and support of both householders and the homeless to flourish.

This project is estimated to cost RM2 million. The breakdown is as follows:

- Land costs (RM350,000)
- Building costs (RM630,000)
- Hydroelectric station (RM20,000)
- Infrastructure (RM1 million)

Sis Looi Sow Fei also of TIMS then presented the fundraising programme. It is a two-pronged strategy consisting of the dissemination of information and the appeal for funds. For example, in the category of disseminating information, the SBS committee has done the following things:

- Promoting the sale of Eastern Horizon
- Producing brochures
- Setting up a Web site
- Producing a periodical SBS newsletter.

In the category of raising funds, three things have been instituted:

- Official collection centres
- Official launch
- Mammoth vegetarian dinner (forthcoming).

May all Dhamma friends support this project generously so that the Buddha Sasana may long endure! ✣

Dinner & Show

IN AID OF SBS PROJECT FUND

Venue
Penang International Sports Arena (PISA), Penang

Sunday
2 December 2000

Time 7.00pm

Enquiries
Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre (MBMC), Penang
04-2822534
(8.30am–5.00pm)
or
Bro Andrew Lim
012-4299252
or
Bro Lum Wei Loong
012-4523558

sbsmbmc@yahoo.com

What's Up North

Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region)

The Meeting of Minds

By Chuah Aik Sam

In support of SBS an illustrious charity dinner and show for the Northern Region will be held on 2 December 2000 at the Penang International Sports Arena (PISA) in Relau. About 5,000 people are expected to attend.

The ad-hoc organising committee for this dinner consists of individuals from various Buddhist organisations such as the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre (MBMC), Mahindarama, Upekkha, Santarama and Sukhi Hotu (Pg), and also several "freelance" Buddhists. Much to our delight, MBMC has offered its premises as the secretariat for this committee. Thank you!

Brother Eddy Low is the organising chairperson, and the full list of the committee members is as follows:

Spiritual Adviser *Venerable Aggacitta*
Liaison Officer *Chuah Aik Sam*
Patron *Dato' Koay Kar Huah*
Organizing Chairperson *Eddy Low*
PA to Organizing Chairperson *Angie Ng*
Vice Chairperson *Lim Eng Lee*
Secretary *Lum Wei Loong*
Assistant Secretary 1 *Low Pei Fern*
Assistant Secretary 2 *Lim Phaik Wah*
Treasurer *Ee Hock Huat*
Assistant Treasurer *Joyce Sim*
Sponsorship Manager *Chuah Aik Sam*
Marketing & Promotions Manager *Andrew Lim*
Communications Manager *Allan Koh*
Programme Manager *Tan Ah Huat*
Stage Manager *Ooi Huat Poh*
Floor Manager *Doreen Lim*
Security & Manpower Manager *Khor Aik Poh*

This charity dinner aims to raise RM250,000 through dinner coupons, sponsorship, pledges, etc. Tables will be available at two prices: RM500 (RM50 per pax) or RM1000 (RM100 per pax). Special tables for patrons will be priced at RM3,000. The dinner coupons are available at MBMC and other Buddhist Centres. There will also be a stage show featuring Buddhist dramas and songs, a multi-media presentation, and other programmes.

Initial preparations and meetings are currently going on. All managers have formed their own sub-committees to implement their plans and strategies to achieve the goal of the dinner. These meetings, I am sure, are occasions for like-minded people to collaborate in creative ways for the benefit of the Buddha Sasana. ✣

Creating a Synergistic Workteam

By Chuah Aik Sam

A team-development session for NCDC(N) was held on 8 July 2000 in Mahindarama Temple, Penang, focusing on the development of diverse individuals into an effective team working towards a common goal. There were 28 participants.

We went through a series of team development games that were mentally and physically demanding. We started off with picture sketching, which was supposed to portray our individuality. Then we were divided into groups assigned to come out with a logo and motto for SBS. A leader from each group explained the group's creation. There were all sorts of designs, e.g. an archer trying to shoot arrows to hit the bull's-eye, something which looked like an old Chinese coin, and a catchy SBS motto— Serve Best Simply!

Later, we played a game called the "Web of Intrigue". Every member of a group had to be connected to each other by tying a string around his or her finger so that a "web" was created to enable small items to

Play to work better... Learning to trust our leader is funny fu

COMFIT Guides Coordination Meeting

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES FOR SBS FUND RAISING EFFORTS **C**ommitment ➢sincere dedication to cause **O**pen-door policy ➢open to innovative ideas and members **M**odesty ➢committed but not aiming for reputation **F**raternity ➢working together in harmony & co-operation ➢each giving their best according to individual capabilities ➢adopting innovative ideas and standardising strategies and management by general consensus **I**ntegrity ➢honesty; abiding by standardised procedures ➢not resorting to crafty manipulations to engage in one-upmanship **T**ransparency ➢candid about project & financial strategies or status

By Lim Lay Hoon

Guided by the COMFIT principles, a coordination meeting for the Nationwide Charity Dinner was hosted for the first time by TIMS at its centre on 28 May 2000. It involved members of the SBS Pro Tem Committee and the Nationwide Charity Dinner Committee (Northern region), or NCDC(N) in short.

This was the first meeting held to coordinate plans and strategies for holding vegetarian dinners in the Northern, Central and Southern regions.

In the spirit of openness, the pro tem committee agreed to the opening of a separate bank account for funds collected in the Northern region. The purpose of this separate account is to facilitate the capital expenses of NCDC(N), which will endeavour to find innovative ideas to raise funds.

Bhante Aggacitta, who is the driving force behind SBS, advised: "There should be no partisan loyalty. As members of this big family who are working towards the same goal, we have to be compromising, open to ideas and abide by the general consensus at meetings."

Not meant to discomfit... Ven Aggacitta expounding his concept of COMFIT.

To the delight of everyone at the meeting, the Finance Manager of the pro-tem committee, Bro Ng Kian Chong, disclosed that donations received to date amounted to RM540,000. Together with pledges, the total collection has reached almost RM700,000. So much in such a short time! This is the result of the hard work and cooperation of all involved, in particular the exemplary drive and dynamism of the pro tem committee which has worked tirelessly and unselfishly right from the start. The meeting culminated in a note of optimism and harmony. ✣

be carried on it. Just imagine, our group had to make sure those little items did not fall off as we went down three flights of steps to the car park, made a turn beside the Sima hall and up the steps again. Some of the Mahindarama devotees stared shockingly at us as if we were doing a new Buddhist prayer with strings and things around our fingers!

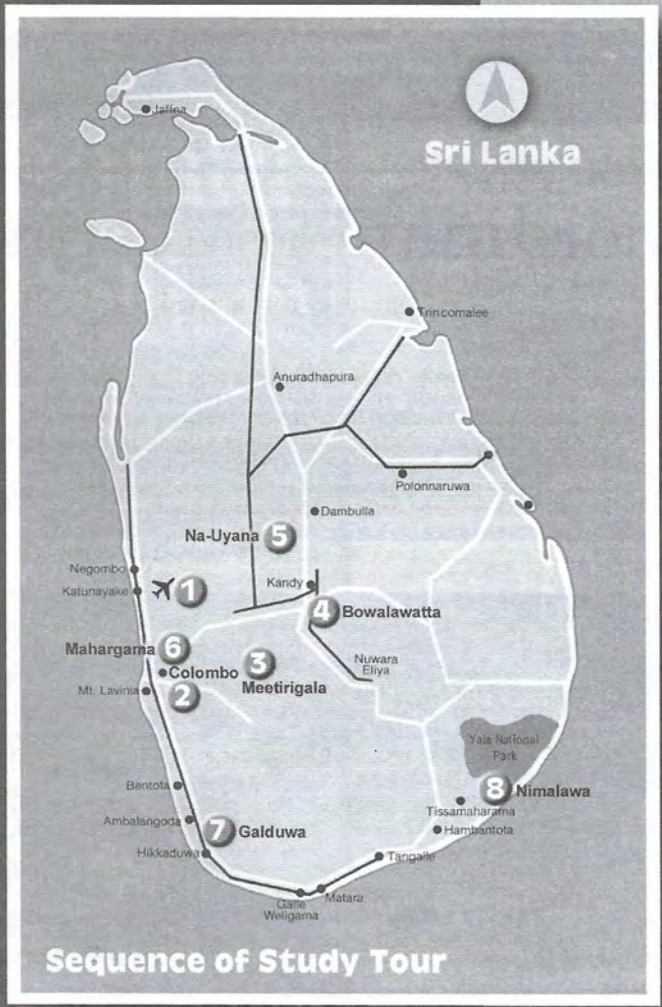
Another interesting game involved two groups. Each member of a group was given a number beginning from one. When the facilitator called out a number, the groups had to equal the number as fast as they could, using the symbols (+, –, x, ÷) with the given numbers.

Then we had to build the tallest and firmest structure, using only drinking straws and paper clips, followed by a shock-proof holder to keep an egg from breaking when thrown onto the wall. Of course, we only had those straws and cellophane tape for construction.

The most physically demanding game was the last one, called "Jungle Safari". Again we were divided into two groups according to gender. All of us were blindfolded except the leader of each group. Guided by our leaders, we had to crawl under rows of chairs, over tables, up and down the staircase, above high and uneven cushions, etc.

After all the fun, we really learned a lot about trust and cooperation, thanks to the facilitator, Bro Eddy Low, and all the participants. Indeed from individuals, we are now creating an effective and efficient team to achieve the goals of the dinner. ✣

Old Roots New Shoots



Digging up the roots... Theng San & Ven Aggacitta by the gigantic bamboo shoots in University Forest Solitude, Bowalawatta.

Theravada *scriptures originated from India, where they were orally transmitted for about 400 years before they were finally inscribed on dried palm leaves in Sri Lanka in the 1st century BC. Eventually Theravada Buddhism became virtually extinct in India and took root in Sri Lanka. There, great commentators, such as Venerables Buddhaghosa and Dhammapala, produced copious exegeses in the Pali Language, giving graphic descriptions of customs and practices during their times. Throughout the ages, the state of the Sasana in the island fluctuated, necessitating several waves of Sangha reform movements.*

Recently, Venerable Aggacitta visited Sri Lanka to study contemporary interpretations and practices of the Vinaya scriptural tradition with particular emphasis on the management and administration of Sangha training monasteries. Saccesi *interviews Ven Aggacitta on the trip.*

"I was struck by the radiance of his loving-kindness, composure, discretion and diplomacy."

Saccesi: Bhante, I understand this is your first visit to Sri Lanka. In the 20-odd years that you've been a monk, haven't you ever thought of going to Sri Lanka?

Ven Aggacitta: Sri Lanka had not been part of my itinerary, before and after I donned the robes. It was only during my recent visit to Bodhinyana Monastery, Serpentine, Western Australia, that I felt inspired to investigate modern developments in the forest monasteries of Sri Lanka. There I had met and discussed Vinaya interpretations and practices with Ven Dhammasiha, a German monk ordained in Sri Lanka, who had stayed in several Sri Lankan forest monasteries of good Vinaya discipline.

How long was your visit and did you go with a large entourage like your other study tours to Thailand and Western Australia?

Armed with reliable contacts from Ven Dhammasiha and an Australian *thera* [senior monk] staying in Ipoh, Ven Nagita (who had been in Sri Lanka for thirteen years), volunteer *kappiyakaraka* [managing attendant] Lee Theng San and I left for Kandy on 11 June 2000. We were earlier advised to extend the duration of our visit, originally planned until 23 June, so that we could stay longer in each of the recommended forest monasteries and get a better "feel" of the various establishments. Though we kept our options open until 30 June, we were fortunate that everything went on so smoothly that we were able to keep to our original schedule. Our special thanks go to the Danish *thera*, Ven Mettavihari who lived up to his name [One Who Dwells in Loving-kindness] by providing such excellent hospitality, arrangements, advice and guidance with respect to our visit as well as our project.

Because of the political unrest and relatively poor transport facilities in Sri Lanka I thought it would be best to go with just one *kappiyakaraka*. Besides, we'd be visiting forest monasteries in various parts of the island and there would have been problems with accommodation and food for a large contingent.

What sort of forest monasteries did you visit? Which parts of the island did your trip take you to?

Ven Dhammasiha had recommended us to study the set-up of some model monasteries of the *"Shri Kalyani Yogashramaya Sangstava"*, a Sangha reform movement founded in the early 50's by Venerables K Jinavamsa and M Nyanarama. Michael Carrithers made a detailed study of the movement in his book, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). Here, have a look at this letter written by Ven Dhammasiha:

> [It] is an independent part of the *Ramaññа Nikaya*. They are keeping a strict standard of the Vinaya (commentarial interpretation), recognised as the strictest standard of any major organisation in Sri Lanka. Their monks are easily recognised by the palm-leaf umbrellas they are using and by the habit of wearing the *sanghati* [outer or double robe] whenever they go outside the monastery precincts. Remarkably for Sri Lanka, all castes are accepted for ordination. Foreign monks who wish to become residents at one of their monasteries are usually expected to undergo the so-called *dalhikamma*, a short ceremony meant to reconfirm the validity of their original *upasampada* [higher ordination]. After that they are accepted according to their normal seniority.
>
> Ven Jinavamsa Mahathera, [one of] the founder[s] of the Sangstava, is now over 90 years old. Thus Ven Na-Uyana Ariyadhamma Mahathera [with 40 *vassas*], his successor and present "administrative registrar", has taken over most of the business. He is highly proficient in the Pa Auk meditation system as well as in the Mahasi tradition, and he has mastered the traditional scriptures.
>
> I think, Bhante, Ven Ariyadhamma will be the most rewarding person to meet for inquiries about establishing a new monastery...

Did you manage to meet the Mahatheras?

Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera happened to be in Colombo on 12 June, but because of his very tight schedule, we were unable to meet him for a lengthy discussion. Instead, he invited us to have breakfast with him at a private residence. As he glided from his room to join us in the hall, his movements seemed to be graced by mindfulness, maternal warmth and a charming smile. After breakfast, we talked briefly about Sangha management and administration until visitors who had arrived for their appointments interrupted us. The Mahathera then suggested that I could meet him again on 20 June in Galduva, the present central monks training centre and headquarters of the Sangstava. I was struck by the radiance of his loving-kindness, composure, discretion and diplomacy. At Galduva I met Venerable Jinavamsa Mahathera. He looked old and frail at 93, but his mind was still alert and his speech sharp and clear.

Crisp advice... "Just do it. You'll learn as you go along," encouraged Ven Jinavamsa Mahathera.

The Mahathera must have been pretty busy because he's now practically the leading figure of the Sangstava. Before you left, did he suggest any particular monastery to visit?

Yes. I think he must have suggested Meetirigala. Or perhaps Ven Mettavihari had already discussed the matter with him prior to our arrival. Anyway, on the same day, Ven Mettavihari arranged for us to visit the International Buddhist Research and Information Centre (IBRIC) where he is one of the resident monks. He is currently spearheading two massive IT projects: producing in CD-ROM the Sri Lankan version of the Pali Tipitaka and the PTS English translations of the Pali Canon. At IBRIC we met Ven Prof Dhammavihari and briefly discussed our SBS project. Apparently he had participated in drafting the constitution of the

management committees of IBRIC and another monks training centre. He emphasised that the Sangha should have the final say in the physical planning and layout of the project and other major decisions.

Buddhism in IT...Ven Mettavihari (left) banters with Ven Prof Dhammavihari and Ven Aggacitta at IBRIC.

Hmm, looks like the problem of lay people trying to control monks is not only confined to Malaysia after all. But Bhante, do tell us more about your adventures in the forest. Did you encounter any problems with the Tamil Tigers?

We didn't meet any tigers so I wouldn't be able to say whether they were Tamils or not. Colombo was just swarming with soldiers all the way from the airport. But it was so peaceful in the (central) countryside you wouldn't realise that there were clashes between the army and the Tamil Tigers. The only adventure we had was a puncture on the way to Kandy, and a taxi that stalled several times when the driver tried to climb a slope (probably mistaking third gear for first gear) on the return journey to Colombo. Sorry to disappoint you.

Well, if we don't get to hear adventure stories, I guess we'll have to be satisfied with informative accounts. Bhante, can you tell us about the findings of your study tour?

After lunch at the Lanka Bhavana International Vipassana Meditation Centre, where we had spent our first night, Ven Mettavihari accompanied us to Meetirigala, about two hours' drive east of Colombo. Not far from Meetirigala are two branch monasteries of the Sangstava: Nissaranavanaya and Dhammayatana. ***Nissaranavanaya*** is a long established meditation monastery where the Mahasi method is taught. Single brick kutis with attached toilets and walkways (many are covered) for walking meditation are located in secluded sites spread throughout the sprawling 50-odd acres of virgin tropical forestland. Because of the thick undergrowth, huge trees and frequent rain, the monastery suffers from excessive dampness. Moss and fungi are commonly seen on rocks, tree trunks and branches, pavements, and the walls and roofs of buildings. The humidity is further aggravated by the frugality of windows and ventilation openings. Many monks also complain of this situation but it seems nothing much can be done because the undergrowth and trees cannot be damaged according to state law. We were informed that the site was actually part of a State forest reserve.

Since we're also in the tropics and even closer to the Equator, we'd certainly face the same problem unless we make sure that the undergrowth is regularly cleared and the trees are spaced far apart. Perhaps we should also have more openings in our buildings.

Yes, you're right. But I wonder why the designers of the buildings never thought about that last point? In contrast, ***Dhammayatana***, which is located on an adjacent piece of reclaimed farmland, seems to be a more healthful environment to stay in. There may be a few reasons for this. First, the monastery precincts were formerly freehold farmland that was bought up by the management committee about 15 years ago. Professional architectural and planning services were then sought to develop the site into a monks training centre. In the developed areas, open spaces were turfed and landscaped, whereas fast growing trees such as wattle (*acacia auriculiformis*) were planted elsewhere. These circumstances seem to make it less dense in foliage and therefore more ventilated and exposed to direct sunlight. Since it was originally meant to be a training centre complementing the adjacent meditation monastery, there are just a few single kutis for the Abbot and senior monks. Student monks are accommodated in single rooms surrounding a courtyard and connected to an improvised dining hall and a large communal bathroom.

Besides kutis and dormitories, do they have other buildings as well?

In both monasteries there are the standard facilities: sima hall, library, shrine hall, stupa, bodhi tree terrace, dining hall

Into the wilderness...Nissaranavanaya (Forest of Liberation) is certainly liberal in jungle dampness.

Drawing the line... Mock alms round at the pindapata complex, Nissaranavanaya.

Resident monks, especially juniors, are not allowed to venture into the village for alms, nor are they encouraged to participate in pastoral activities...

with attached kitchen, meditation hall, and the pindapata complex with kitchen, stores, office, and accommodation for resident staff and lay visitors.

I was informed that throughout its monasteries, the Sangstava endeavours to maintain a detached relationship with regard to Sangha-laity contact. Resident monks, especially juniors, are not allowed to venture into the village for alms, nor are they encouraged to participate in pastoral activities such as giving Dhamma talks or chanting services for the laity, or have direct dealings with the villagers regarding the supply of personal requisites.

The pindapata complex was designed to help fulfil this important objective. It is usually located at the fringe of the monastery or at another available piece of land between the monastery and the village. Devotees who wish to perform dana must first arrange a suitable date with the resident lay manager. They will then arrive with their provisions at the pindapata complex on the evening before the dana, stay overnight to prepare breakfast and lunch and return after dana and a short thanksgiving talk. On *uposatha* or other important festive days lay devotees may also observe the 8 precepts and stay in the complex, or they may be permitted to visit the monastery for a specified period. They are not normally allowed to enter the monastery proper outside visiting hours (usually 12 noon to 2pm).

It's interesting to hear about how they do things in Sri Lanka but I wonder if that's the sort of way we Malaysians would want to adopt?

Well, that's food for thought. Every situation has its pros and cons. We have to look at it from various angles before making a decision. But let me elaborate on the dana management at Dhammayatana, which is also quite exceptional. All cooking is done by employed staff in the pindapata complex. Devotees who wish to perform dana are allowed to bring specified dry provisions only once a week. Otherwise, dana committee members will provide the food items. "This system may help to prevent wastage, but at the expense of the nutritional quality and variety of food offered to the monks," commented a former resident monk. "No wonder many of them fall sick or go elsewhere." I suppose this was told to me because I was a fellow monk, but such a remark would probably never have got to the lay committee's ears.

Bhante, you mentioned that monks were not encouraged to ask for their personal requisites directly from the villagers. How then does a monk obtain his requisites?

A capable and trustworthy monk (usually the Abbot) is normally appointed to be in charge of requests for personal requisites. He may also be the Sangha storekeeper. To help lighten his heavy responsibility, requests are normally entertained once a week only. He will have to use his discretion to decide on requests for things not found in the storeroom, and inform the lay manager of the requisites if they are appropriate for monks.

That's interesting. Did you find out about the procedure of selection and appointment, Bhante?

In Nissaranavanaya, there is a Sangha Management Committee comprising the Abbot and 4 other senior monks who have been residents for 4 or 5 years. The Abbot is selected by the National Sangha Council of the Sangstava and approved

Thrifty expense... Smart-looking pindapata complex at Dhammayatana.

Magnificent disappointment... Meditation hall in Dhammayatana braves the elements.

by Ven Jinavamsa Mahathera or Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera. The others are proposed, seconded and admitted into their positions by consensus at a Sangha meeting. The committee's duty is to define problem areas, discuss solutions and make proposals to the Sangha for approval. A book of suggestions and complaints is also available at the Abbot's kuti, where any monk can record his opinion on any monastic issue. This provision has been made because the Abbot may not always have the time to give personal interviews although he is directly approachable.

There seems to be some basic elements of democracy in their system. Perhaps it'll be useful for SBS founders to work on the idea. How about lay management? Do they have a parallel structure too?

The management of Dhammayatana deserves special mention because, unlike the 120-odd branch monasteries of the Sangstava, the centre was not offered to the Sangstava or to the Sangha of the four directions. A society was legally formed to buy up a piece of farmland and develop it into a monks training centre for 10 to 12 students, but preferably for six or seven monks. According to its founder Mr N G P Panditaratna, "This may sound dictatorial, but the society was formed with the minimum members so that decisions can be made quickly and effectively." The Sangstava headquarters at Galduva was made the Religious Director of the centre, with the primary purpose of managing Sangha affairs, including making recommendations about monastic issues to the society. However, the Sangha was apparently not involved in the physical layout and planning of the centre and the design of the individual buildings.

That would be contrary to the advice given by Ven Prof Dhammavihari, wouldn't it?

Certainly. I remember Ajahn Brahm telling me when I visited him in Australia, "I never let lay people design any of the buildings in this monastery. They're not going to stay in them. We are. They wouldn't understand the needs of monks. So all the buildings are designed by me." I must admit that I really admire the beautiful architecture of the buildings in Dhammayatana. The meditation hall is especially magnificent. But unfortunately the monks complain that it is not very useful because the rain comes in with the strong wind and the afternoon sun shines through. Repeated requests for renovations have not been entertained. Also the original dining hall is located too far away from where the monks are staying, so the Sangha has converted one of the larger rooms in the dormitory complex into a make-shift dining area.

It's amazing how ironical things can turn out to be. The monastery was meant to be a monks training centre, serving the needs of monks. Yet they don't seem to be getting what they need. Perhaps there's more to it than meets the eye. Anyway, Bhante, let's get back to lay management. How do they admit monks for training?

Guided by the belief that reform can only be effective by starting afresh, the society determined not to accept any ordained samaneras or bhikkhus but to advertise in the press for prospective candidates below 40 years of age. Applicants and their fathers were then interviewed, and successful candidates were required to undergo a probation period of 2 years as *anagarikas* [lay renunciates] dressed in white and observing 10 precepts. During that time they were trained in the theory and practice of the samanera's way of life and observed by their teachers (sent by Galduva) for suitability in their chosen vocation. Needless to say, there were dropouts. But the dropout rate has been minimal — less than 10% — probably because of the stringent screening of applicants. Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera explained, "This 2-year probation period is peculiar only to Dhammayatana. In other Sangstava monasteries, we decide according to individual cases."

Open-handed diplomacy... Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera shares his knowledge and experience through translator Ven Vajiravamsa.

Will SBS adopt a similar policy?

I think the Mahathera's explanation is very sound.

How are they trained after they become samaneras?

When I was at Dhammayatana on 13 June, the monks training centre had temporarily closed down. Two of its teachers were meditating in Pa Auk Forest Monastery, Myanmar, while a Pa Auk meditation teacher from Myanmar, Ashin Aggannya, was conducting a one-year retreat there for the centre's students as well as other monks and yogis from elsewhere. Information on the course of training was obtained when I visited the Sangstava's HQ at Galduva on 20 June. During my discussion with Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera, I gathered that the students were given quite a rounded education. Pali grammar, the Vinaya Pitaka and its commentaries, the first two books of the Abhidhamma Pitaka, *Abhidhammatthasangaha* (a commentarial compedium), and even the *Visuddhimagga* are offered. Surprisingly, suttas are not taught. "After they've mastered Pali grammar, they can study on their own," said the translator, Ven Vajiravamsa. Before a samanera can qualify to become a monk he must be able to recite and understand the *Patimokkha* [Code of (the 227 Major) Monastic Rules]. Generally, a bhikkhu will be encouraged to complete his 5-year *nissaya* (tutelage) under a competent teacher/s, but there are cases of samaneras and junior bhikkhus who are permitted to participate in long term meditation retreats at approved branch monasteries.

I notice there's a lot of book-study involved. Is Galduva just another academic centre?

Goodness, no. They have exams but they don't issue certificates. When we were travelling in a three-wheeler from Ambalangoda to Galduva, the driver praised the centre as "the best temple in Sri Lanka. There, the priests don't smoke, don't use money. Not like other priests. They very good." I investigated their daily schedule and observed the conduct of the monks there. They were definitely trying to put into practice what they had learnt in the scriptures. One outstanding ancient practice that they've managed to preserve is using the palm-leaf umbrella as a shade against the sun. You can't find that in Myanmar or Thailand. I read about it in the scriptures and invented one when I was in the forest in Myanmar. It wasn't like theirs but it was certainly a novelty in Myanmar.

Sounds like a holistic centre to train all-rounder monks. Do they have modern facilities like electricity, telephones, computers and so on?

There was electricity in all the forest monasteries I visited, except in Dhammayatana. To ensure that monks retain their reclusive way of life, newspapers, radios and television sets are not allowed in the centre. Neither is there electricity. "That will be more conducive to meditation," said Mr Panditaratna. "You don't need to turn on the lights when you're meditating." In Galduva, there is also a telephone. When I took my leave from Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera on 22 June, he agreed to my suggestion to offer a CD-ROM of the Tipitaka and other Pali texts to the centre at Galduva. So it seems likely that he may allow computers to be installed there.

Besides Galduva and Meetirigala, what are the other monasteries you visited?

After two nights at Meetirigala, we proceeded to the University Forest Solitude, Bowalawatta, above Kandy, on 14 June. That was not a Sangstava branch. Set in over 30 acres of beautiful, hilly forest land, it was founded by a strict Vinaya expert, Ven A Rahula Mahathera of the Amarapura Nikaya. We went there on the recommendation of the three Western monks mentioned earlier. It wasn't a monks training centre but more of a peaceful retreat centre where resident monks were expected to live according to the Vinaya and do their own practice. Informal teaching and guidance is available from its acting Abbot, Ven Sanathavihari Mahathera. The management there is traditionally Abbot-centred, but Ven Sanathavihari (formerly an accountant) favours group consultation and decision-making. The high altitude, thick forest and wet weather made it too cold and damp for us, so we left for Na-Uyana Arannya after spending a night there.

Another important consideration also prompted us to curtail our stay in the Solitude. We wanted to catch Ven Ariyananda, the young, acting Abbot of Na-Uyana Forest Monastery, before he left for an important annual national ordination ceremony of the Sangstava in Galduva, scheduled to be held on 18 June. It turned out that we stayed 3 nights there. We met Ven Kittisaro from Singapore, Ven Mangala from Malaysia, and Bro Sim from KL. There were also an Australian senior monk of the Ajahn Chah tradition and a German junior monk. Ven Ariyananda speaks English and teaches the Pa Auk method of meditation. Na-Uyana was supposed to be an ancient monastery given to the Sangha by the royalty about 2000 years ago. Enclosed within a shady forest with gigantic ironwood trees and numerous rock overhangs, it is always cool even though it lies in the dry zone of the island.

On 16 June 2000, when Sri Lankans throughout the island celebrated the day the arahant Ven Mahinda arrived more than 2,000 years ago to spread the Buddha's teaching, we had an interesting discussion with Ven Ariyananda about monastery management and techniques of teaching meditation. He said all the other aspects of managing the monastery were simple compared to the task of maintaining harmony in the Sangha. Although he had the authority to make administrative decisions, he favoured consultation with other senior monks and the consensus of all Sangha members.

Looks like people who've had secular education before they become monks tend to be more democratic in their approach to management and administration.

I wouldn't jump to such a conclusion. I think it depends very much on the individual. Some people are just born to be domineering and authoritative. Remember: Mr Panditaratna admitted, "This may sound dictatorial, but..." We met him on 19 June in Colombo, thanks to Ven Mettavihari's widespread connections. Talking about secular education, he was a former police officer and accountant. I have already mentioned some aspects of his style of managing Dhammayatana. But do let me tell you about the other monasteries we visited...

I'm sorry for the interruption, Bhante. Please continue.

Later the same day we visited an Amarapura Nikaya monks training centre called Shri Vajiranyana Dhammayatane at Mahargama, near Colombo. Ven A Rahula Mahathera was its co-founder. However, he left the centre in the early 80's to devote his time to the practice of meditation, and started a chain of retreat monasteries throughout Sri Lanka, including Vajirarama / University Forest Solitude. During lunch dana I noticed that there were mostly samaneras. Things were more urban there and the atmosphere felt quite different from the forest monasteries we had visited. As I had been forewarned, I sensed a gap between theory and practice so I did not pursue my investigation into the set-up of the centre.

Some of the findings of my Galduva visit have already been mentioned earlier. After my fruitful meeting with Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera, where he furnished me with a lot of information and useful advice, we made a tour of the centre. It reminded me very much of Nissaranavanaya, Meetirigala, with the dense forest, brick buildings and dampness. However, the precincts were very much smaller – less than 4 acres, I think.

The last forest monastery we visited was Nimalava, adjoining Yala West National Park, on the southeast coast of Sri Lanka. Three vanloads of monks from Galduva had been invited for a Mahasanghadana there, so the Ven Mahathera had made prior arrangements for us to follow them. It was a hot dry zone and the environment reminded me very much of the countryside of central Myanmar: dusty and hot, with low trees, shrubs and bushes amid sandy grassland. Only there were much more rocks here. "There are countless rock (overhang) caves in this area where arahants had lived in before," claimed a Sri Lankan monk. "And here," he pointed out, "is the renovated cave of the powerful arahant Ven Dhammadinna." He also showed us ancient inscriptions above the rock overhangs, which he presumed were in Brahmi script. Nimalava is a meditation retreat monastery, not a monks' training centre.

Bastion of antiquity... Castle-like stupa perches majestically on a rocky outcrop in Nimalava, the legendary abode of ancient arahants.

So it seems like the Sangstava has two main types of establishments – meditation monasteries and monks training centres. Are there many significant differences between the two?

According the Michael Carrithers, when Venerable Jinavamsa started his campaign to reform the Sangha in the late 40's he received substantial support from wealthy lay devotees to start a monks training centre, but he had no monks willing to train under his strict discipline. So his lay supporters made an innovative move by advertising in the press for candidates who had the right motivation to renounce the world for the sake of liberation, rather than for any other mundane aims. Eventually they got their monks and today, half a century later, the Sangstava has more than 120 branch monasteries throughout Sri Lanka. So we can see that they started off with a monks training centre. But the monks were not just taught academic stuff. They were not studying for knowledge only. They were trying to uncover the roots, to return to the original teachings — restraint according to the Vinaya, ascetic practices, life in the forest, seclusion, detachment from the laity, suitable methods of meditation. So, as they studied, they were also trying to practise.

Later, lay benefactors offered them secluded dwellings in the forests especially dedicated for the practice of meditation. Nissaranavanaya in Meetirigala was one of them. Initially, it was inhabited by learned, senior monks who had rallied to support the Sangha reform movement. The devotees provided the monks with everything to facilitate their meditative progress. Even their robes were washed for them. Volunteer workers swept the whole monastery, including paths for walking meditation and the compounds of their kutis.

Eventually however, there were more junior than senior monks who came for meditation. Because of their lack of knowledge and experience in the Vinaya, it became necessary for the junior monks to undergo some sort of training as well. So, now at Nissaranavanaya, there is some Vinaya teaching going on besides meditation practice.

Na-Uyana Arannya is also another meditation retreat centre. More than forty years ago a *mahathera* [elder senior] had stayed there as a lone meditator. After he died there were no permanent resident monks until 1997, when Ven Ariyadhamma Mahathera sent Ven Ariyananda and 15 other monks from Galduva to develop it into a Pa Auk meditation centre. It is doing very well now with a lot of new rock (overhang) cave kutis and other buildings. However, I noticed that there were beginning signs of weakness in the system. There were some novices who had been doing meditation since they were postulants and they were not given any formal training like that in Galduva or Dhammayatana. If my enquiries and observation are correct, I think such a situation would not augur well for the future.

Alien togetherness... Venerables Aggacitta, Kittisaro and Mangala (L to R) outside the latter's rock overhang kuti in Na-Uyana Arannya.

Why do you think so Bhante?

The Buddha laid down the Vinaya rules so that the monks could live together as a community, in harmony and fraternity, in an environment conducive to their spiritual development and meditative progress. It is important for members of the Sangha to properly understand its rules and regulations, monastic etiquette, customs, and other subtleties of the Vinaya, and be motivated to abide by them. Only then can there be harmony and fraternity. Otherwise, if each were to do his own thing, disagreement and quarrels would ensue. Such a situation would certainly not be conducive to peaceful meditation. So I think that monks should be properly trained in the Vinaya first before they pursue full-time meditation practice. That's why the Buddha made a rule that a newly ordained monk must stay with a competent Vinaya teacher for at least five years in order to master the Vinaya before he can be independent.

Bhante, you seem to have gathered a lot of interesting and useful information for just a short visit of 11 days.

This is only the gist of our experiences. I could write a booklet on our trip. But let me relate one more interesting encounter before we end this interview. On the way back from Na-Uyana to Colombo, which was about a 5-hour ride by taxi, a Caucasian monastic who had been in the robes for about 18 years accompanied us. He was originally from a Western forest monastery, but had "left the system years ago." When he knew about our SBS project, he gave his candid comments on it. As he had stayed in Malaysia before, he remarked that the Malaysian (Chinese Theravada) Sangha was very dispersed. "You'll never be able to get them together. Every one wants to be his own boss. They don't have respect for their seniors, especially those who're just 2 or 3 vassas older. They think everybody should be treated equally."

He also suggested that in order for the project to work, the centre must be "secluded from the mad, mad world. No computers, no publishing work, no newspapers, no teaching the laity. Just concentrate on the monks' life." He cautioned that we should not make the same mistakes that [a well known monastery in the West] had made and is making. "It's mad. There're a thousand and one things going on there and everything is so dissipated. Can you imagine? Monks have to do administration, management, desk-top publishing, building, repairs, gardening, chopping wood for fuel, endless chores, meditate, study, teach monks, nuns, lay adults and children, counselling, and more. The Sangha-lay relationship, especially between women and young monks, is just too close. We see monks and nuns pairing off, senior monks disrobing...the whole system is just crazy."

Another observation he made was the folly of openness. "At the monastery they have an excellent library. Almost anything under the sun can be found there. Not only Theravada, Zen, Vajrayana, Mahayana Buddhism, but also books on New Age literature, spirituality, all sorts of religions, anything. When you read all those stuff you get influenced. And they're so open you can do any sort of practice you fancy in the Temple – anything at all. So when you step into the meditation hall you get these queer vibes... They don't really know what they're doing. They're still in the process of experimenting to find out the 'best' system. Here in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma, you go to a forest monastery and you know that they've got it right. You can see that they're doing monkish things, that it's really a monastery. But in there, you don't get that feeling. You know something's wrong there; this just isn't it."

So in closing I wish to express my sincere thanks to all those venerable members of the Sangha as well as lay devotees who have helped to make our study tour of Sri Lanka a most smooth, memorable, and invaluable experience. We are particularly grateful to Ven Mettavihari Thera for his patience, hospitality and expert planning. And of course, how can I forget my faithful companion, Theng San, whose loving care and support followed me like a shadow? The only way I can repay you, Theng San, is by bequeathing you the Dhammavinaya when you go forth in SBS. I hope you won't take too long to make up your mind.

Thank you, Bhante, for giving us this very interesting interview. Now I wish I were in Theng San's shoes. ✣

The Devas Beamed

Family Day at SBS

For three consecutive days, Taiping's reputation as the wettest town in Peninsula Malaysia manifested itself and climaxed in a thunderstorm which stirred up the mud on Thursday, three days before Family Day. The gloomy weather continued into Friday but then, from Taiping town, SBS was seen to be bathing in a ray of sunshine. Our hopes abounded. Sure enough Family Day, Sunday, 25 June 2000, was bright and sunny. The devas would not have had it otherwise.

Lee Yu Ban shares his personal impressions of the event.

Under SBS umbrella... The project has bought many different Buddhist organisations to work together for the first time.

That morning saw my family together with scores of KLites moving out in several convoys, snaking through narrow roads and following oh-so-slow Taiping drivers, before finally turning into a cemetery. A cemetery? Yes, this was the grand entrance to Sasanarakkha.

We left our parked cars in the care of the cemetery's residents, and had a pleasant and welcome morning walk through bushland and orchards. As the adults chatted along the way in the shade of the forest trees, the children tripped on ahead, drawn by the distant roar of the waterfall. About 20 minutes later, we were there: 50 metres of cold water cascading over three levels of white granite rock! Already the children were frolicking in the deep green pools. And as a backdrop to the waterfalls was a steep green hill with a little white house on the upper slope - Sasanarakkha's promised land!

Apparently, there are two ways to the little white house, or kuti, where Ven Aggacitta would be waiting: the Zen way, which is a direct assault straight up the hill, fording the stream and climbing over boulders up a steep incline; or the way of the karma yogi, a leisurely and pleasant walk amidst the shade of trees along the path that eventually meanders up to it. Ven Aggacitta had, of course, used the Pure Land way: he had called on the name of the driver of the 4WD, who immediately took him there.

Perhaps our delightful hosts were all ardent practitioners of meditation, as they omitted to inform us of the easier, leisurely way. Thus one could see all those people in various levels of fitness, struggling over rocks and up steep muddy slopes, in a long straggly line all the way from the waterfall, past the durian trees and up to the top kuti. Oh, many "souls" were tested that day! Several may not be aware they had no souls but they certainly discovered another insight of equal profundity — no breath. Anyway, those who dared eventually made it to the upper kuti just in time for dana to the monks: Ven Aggacitta and two Australians, Ven Nagita and Ven Sujato, from Ipoh. It was very crowded at the top. I was tired and looked for a comfortable, shady place to rest. I managed to press my way through the crowd to poke my head into the little house where the monks were having their meal. Immediately, I caught the attention of Ven Aggacitta and was blessed with the task of writing this article. Whoa! Kamma works in strange ways.

After lunch, most of us took in the sights from the hill: the view of greenery all around, of steep hills covered in forest, their peaks shrouded in wet mist. Below us we could still hear the rumble of the waterfall. A perfect site for a forest monastery! It was exciting to stand there witnessing the start of a vision taking its first form. And as if to herald that lofty event, Chief Reverend Dr K Sri Dhammananda and Ven Aggacitta, on behalf of SBS family released a flock of birds from their cages: the first to find freedom from bondage on this land. What an auspicious beginning! ✣

So near yet so far... Tackling the beautiful but daunting slopes of SBS.

Note *from* THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE OF SBS FAMILY DAY:

It had not dawned on us, until much later, that while we country folk always find the walk to the kuti via the waterfall an enjoyable experience, our city cousins would find the hike very taxing. We would like to think that if there were at all any people who did not enjoy the hike up the waterfall and did not feel the positive vibes of the "qi", they at least enjoyed the pot luck array of food.

We wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to all our guests from Penang, Ipoh, Selangor and Kuala Lumpur for making the Family Day a success. To those who are still nursing their sore legs and sunburnt skin, we would like to apologise for any oversight on the part of TIMS which has contributed to your suffering. But dukkha *is part of existence and* anicca *will heal the aches and pains.*

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aspect of site development, touching on measures to improve the approach road and prevent further erosion. He suggests the use of bricks for paving the road and making concrete drains as the most economical proposal. The meeting decides on the following:

- Obtain written consent from neighbouring landowners before implementing the proposal
- Obtain detailed survey of internal paths and roads and of proposed site for water sima
- Start site recommendations for approach road on 17 June
- Have Kim and Jade finish the conceptual master plan by 30 June
- Finalise layout on site on 1 and 2 July.

8 June Merit Magazine (a new Mandarin publication) interviews Venerable Aggacitta on the SBS project.

9 June Venerable Aggacitta starts his potential monk recruitment drive by giving an inspiring talk on the purpose of renunciation and the SBS project to members of Taman Seri Serdang Buddhist Houses.

11-23 June Accompanied by volunteer *kappiyakaraka* Lee Theng San, Venerable Aggacitta travels to Sri Lanka to study contemporary interpretations and practices of the scriptural Vinaya tradition with particular emphasis on the management and administration of Sangha training monasteries.

14 June Dr Soo comes to SBS site and makes recommendations on site for improving approach road.

15 June Venerables Radha Bhikkhu, Nyanaviro Bhikkhu and Warathami Samanera, together with 25 members and devotees of MBMC (Dhamma Section), visit SBS site.

17 June Sayadaws U Dhammapiya, U Silacara and U Pandita (Jr) visit SBS site.

25 June Family Day at SBS site organised by TIMS. Chief Reverend Dr K Sri Dhammananda, and Venerables Aggacitta, Nagita and Sujato grace the event. Two buses from SJ and Ipoh, and several cars from Selangor and Penang bring many outstation devotees from various Buddhist organisations to SBS. Including Taiping hosts, about a hundred people swarm over the scenic, undulating land.

28 June Nepalese monks Sayadaw Jnanapurnik and Ven Yasodhamma, together with visitors from Penang and Sabah, visit SBS site. After lunch dana at TIMS centre, the venerable visitors proceed to have a look at Khemarama, Ven Aggacitta's present vihara.

1 July Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma talk entitled "sangha@-buddhadhamma.com" in Buddhist Meditation Society Sitiawan. An SBS road-show presentation by TIMS team follows.

5 July Dr Soo, Ven Aggacitta and others visit SBS site to check location feasibility of proposed buildings shown on conceptual master plan for SBS.

8 July SBS Road Show at Seck Kia Eenh, Melaka. About 100 hundred people listen attentively to the presentation.

11 July Venerables Katapunnya Thera and Kovida Samanera visit SBS site.

12 July A cheque of RM105,000 is issued to lawyer Toh Thiam Hock & Co as final payment for SBS land.

13 July Some members of SBS B&D Team meet at Satyaloka Centre, KL, to discuss alterations to conceptual plan, and project management schedule.

21-23 July Dhamma Talks and SBS Road Show are held in Sarawak at Buddha Dhamma Centre (BDC) and Kuching Buddhist Society (KBS).

24 July Ven Aggacitta gives a talk entitled "In Search of Truth" to the Buddhist students of Multimedia University (MMU) as part of his monk recruitment drive. ✣

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Things have been unfolding at a quick pace since the idea of setting up a local monk-training centre was crystallised. We'd like to share with you the beautiful and exciting process of our development and offer you the opportunity to participate in our inspired, collective efforts.

11 April Local assemblyman, YB Ho Cheng Wang, agrees to be Patron of TIMS, and also agrees to approach State Exco, YB Datuk Ong Ka Chuan, and Minister of Housing and Local Government, YB Dato' Seri Ong Ka Ting, to be Patrons as well.

16 April Site visit by Balik Pulau devotees to survey possibility of constructing a hydro-electric power station.

Ven Aggacitta, together with some members of TIMS and visitors from Penang, visit Ven Dhammavuddho (Phra Hye) at his monastery in Temoh, Perak, where he recently got Sangha Foundation registered under ROC. They discuss the procedure of setting up a foundation.

26 April Local assemblyman, YB Ho Cheng Wang meets Ven Aggacitta and TIMS General Committee members at their centre. Ven Aggacitta presents him a copy of Eastern Horizon and his resume. They discuss the SBS Project, and YB Ho gives his advice on how to carry it out in a discreet manner appropriate to a Muslim country.

29 April SBS Road Show starts at 8.15pm in Nalanda Reading Room and Archives, Ipoh. Two Western monks of the Ajahn Chah tradition, Ven Khemanando and Ven Sujato, attend the show "to give their moral support for the project."

30 April Some members of the MBMC Committee meet with Ven Aggacitta and the Road Show team at Sukhi Hotu, Penang, to discuss the formation of a sub-committee for organising a Charity Dinner (Northern Region) in aid of the SBS project. Road Show continues at 8.30pm in Mahindarama Temple, Penang.

1 May Last show for the weekend starts at 9.15am in Mr Tan's house, 2808-S Taman Golf, Alor Setar.

4 May Dr Soo Kian Sin, our SBS geotechnical engineering consultant, visits the site on his way North.

6 May The inaugural issue of our newsletter, *Sasanarakkha*, is out! Chuah Aik Sam convenes the first meeting of the Nationwide Charity Dinner Committee (Northern Region), or NCDC(N) in short, headed by organising chairperson, Eddy Low, at MBMC meeting room.

7 May Visitors from all over visit the site again. They include Ven Dr U Oktaranyana, a lecturer from the International Theravada Buddhist University, Yangon, Burma; a Mahayana monk from Biow Hong Lim, Penang; a Buddhist couple from Golden Pagoda Buddhist Temple, Singapore; our consultant agronomist Chiu Sheng Bin from Penang; our potential site supervisor-cum-project manager TM Tan from JB; and his civil engineer-cum-contractor friend, Lim from Subang Jaya. We discuss building plans and potentials, as well as organic orchard management measures.

12 May After several revisions of the translation and printing hitches, the Chinese flyers are finally out!

14 May Official Launching Ceremony of the SBS Fund Raising Project commences at 9.10am in SJBA. Everything flows very smoothly.

19 May Second meeting of NCDC(N) at MBMC. Members from various Buddhist societies including MBMC, Mahindarama, Upekkha, Santarama and TIMS, as well as "freelance" Buddhists attend this meeting.

28 May Meeting of SBS Pro tem committee and NCDC(N) at TIMS centre, Kampung Boyan, Taiping, to coordinate marketing strategies and financial management. Another cheque of RM210,000 is issued to the landowner for the payment of SBS land.

1 June Professor Oo Khaik Cheang brings Venerable Ajahn Brahmavamso from Penang to visit Khemarama and SBS site. Dana in upper SBS kuti for Ajahn Brahm and Ven Aggacitta. Both of them perform *uposatha* in a pool above the beautiful waterfall by the SBS site. Ajahn Brahm jokingly suggests that a kuti should be built for him near the waterfall.

4 June First SBS Building and Development (B&D) Team meeting at Satyaloka Centre, KL. Venerable Aggacitta distributes a revised project brief and discussions follow on how to start the project. Dr Soo gives a detailed report on the geotechnical

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