

Sāsanārakkha

◆ NEWSLETTER OF SASANARAKKHA BUDDHIST SANCTUARY a special project of Taiping Insight Meditation Society ◆ RESTRICTED CIRCULATION ONLY ◆ Issue 3 ◆ January 2001 ◆



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Cherishing a Night of Splendour

By Looi Sow Fei

As the lights dimmed, an air of expectancy rippled across the Penang International Sports Arena where some 2,500 diners had gathered. All eyes were on the stage. We had a burning question in our minds. Was the show about to begin? But what about dinner? There was no activity on the dark stage.



UNITY IN HARMONY... Mahindarama choir's harmonious singing reflects the unity of many dedicated Buddhists working for a common cause.

Then, flickering lights came into view on the two giant television screens put up for those of us in a less favourable vantage point. We craned our necks to see where these lights were coming from and their significance. The lights had now been transformed into an advancing line of continually changing crests and dips, growing longer and longer by the seconds. A surprise dragon dance not in the programme?

Actually, it was the first course of the vegetarian dinner! Each dish of this first course bore a lighted candle in the centre. The dishes were carried by a row of waiters as they filed into the stadium. This was the 'special effects' that had created the 'dragon'. A truly clever way to start the dinner. This event was also one of the many spectacular

moments at the SBS Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) held on Sunday, 2 December 2000.

The organisers had filled the evening with touches of pomp and pageantry without being ostentatiously so. From the moment when multi-hued smoke swirled up on the stage to herald the start of the evening's festivities we were treated to a feast of the senses. Indeed, someone at my table commented that it was the best vegetarian dinner she had ever had, a sentiment spontaneously echoed by others.

In this feast of the senses, the mind was not forgotten. The souvenir programme book was specially designed to provide food for

◆ TURN TO PAGE FIVE

Editorial

Diligence in Wholesome Things

As we enter the third millennium, some of us may ponder whether or not world peace will become more evident this era, knowing very well that everywhere conflicts of some kind are happening as we breathe.

Can world peace be achieved? Some might answer "Yes" while others, being more sceptical, might think otherwise. As a Buddha's disciple who understands the goal of meditation, I hold an optimistic view that, yes, world peace is achievable. When our inner world is at peace, we do not contend with the outside world.

In this way, those of us who are concerned with world peace should rightly be encouraged to take heed of the Buddha's advice – to be diligent in wholesome things. Diligence (*appamada*) in wholesome things, when continually developed, the Buddha taught, lead to welfare here and now, and in the future.

So, if ever there was a New Year resolution that must be kept, then it must be this – diligence in wholesome things. Being diligent, we contribute to world peace and to the well being of the Buddha Sasana.

The Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary is an example of what is possible for world peace. By producing monks who serve as good role models to the Buddhist community, it will create a ripple of peace that hopefully, will spread further and further away from its shore, generating an even greater ripple of peace throughout the world.

To date, SBS had reached several milestones. For example, a new road leading to the monastery site had been paved, a documentary made, and a successful Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) had been held. Now it is moving into the 1st phase proper of facilities development, ie. the construction of a pond with a water sima pavillion and 7 kutis. For us, who don't want to miss out on an excellent opportunity to be diligent in wholesome things, we must surely continue to support SBS, both financially and otherwise.

Wishing you a Happy New Millennium Year!

Ang Siew Mun

We've Got Mail

✉ 9 August 2000

I obtained a copy of your August 2000 issue today, and had just finished reading all the articles. The reports were uplifting except for page 17. I was very dismayed that you had found it appropriate to publish disparaging remarks made by "a Caucasian monastic" about "a well known monastery in the West". Even if the information may be deemed useful for our consideration, the manner of reporting is highly inappropriate.

If I am wrong in my opinion I stand corrected, otherwise damage control may be in order.

A concerned and disappointed supporter

Ed. He also made equally candid remarks about Malaysian monks. We respect your opinion as much as we value the spirit of his constructive criticisms. "Sweet words are not sincere; sincere words are not sweet," says the Tao Te Ching. Didn't our Lord Buddha also say "Let him admonish, instruct and shield one from wrong; he, indeed, is dear to the good and detestable to the evil"?

✉ 9 September 2000

Having heard about Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary and contributed to the project, I would be grateful for the following information:

- Are there plans to build kutis* for monks (*individual) and how much is the estimated cost in US dollars? Is it possible for a devotee to offer one kuti by paying in instalments?
- How can one get to SBS, say, from Singapore or Thailand? How about accomodation for laywomen?

May you be well and may you live long to uphold the Buddha's teaching.

H. Nguyen (Ms) Seattle, WA 98122 (USA)

Ed. Sadhu for your generous contribution. Of course, you are most welcome to offer a kuti by paying in installments. Please see page 3 for the cost estimate of a single kuti and other details.

SBS is located in a small town in Malaysia called Taiping. If you are coming from Singapore/Thailand, you can fly to Penang. In Penang you can contact Sis. Doreen Lim of Sukhi Hotu who will then make the arrangements to bring you to Taiping. It takes one hour by car to reach Taiping from Penang. Doreen could be contacted at:

*Address: 42V, Jalan Matang Kuching, 11500 Air Itam,
Penang, Malaysia*

Tel: (603) 8277118

Fax: (603) 8277228

E-mail: sukhihotu@maxis.net.my

There are plans to build guest lodges in SBS. In future, when the buildings are ready, guests can stay there. However, at the

moment, visitors can stay at the Taiping Insight Meditation Centre, which is just 10-15 minutes' drive away from the foothill of SBS. Sadhu for your support. You're most welcome to visit Taiping and SBS any time.

✉ 20 September, 2000

It was with interest that I read Saccesi's interview with you in Sasanarakkha. Bhante, please do not have as your program of studies at SBS that which is at Dhammayatana, but rather follow the instructions of the Buddha:

Whatever Dhamma and Vinaya I have pointed out and formulated for you, that will be your Teacher when I am gone. (Mahaparinibbana Sutta, [D.16] in Ven Bhikkhu Ariyesako's *The Bhikkhu Rules: A Guide for Laypeople*, p.9)

Monks, train yourselves thus: To these very Suttas will we listen, give a ready ear, understand, recite and master them. (Samyutta Nikaya, Sutta 20.7 in Ven Dhamma-vuddho Thera's *Liberation: Relevance of Sutta-Vinaya*, p.19)

Pali and the Vinaya, of course should be studied, but the core, the heart of your programme should be the Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, Sutta Nipata, Udana, Itivuttaka, and Dhammapada. Also, it would be good to include the Theragatha and Therigatha.

The Vinaya is one part of the Holy Life, and the Dhamma is the other. If monks and novices study both parts, there is the possibility that they will live the Holy Life as the Buddha intended them to live it.

With all good wishes for success in your endeavours.

Sol Feldman Bodhinyana Buddhist Monastery, Australia

Venerable Aggacitta: *Thank you very much for sharing your views. Resident monastics will be encouraged to read up on the Buddha's discourses and to try to put them into actual practice. My primary purpose will be to train them that they may be competent enough to be independent, especially of translators and bigoted scholars and practitioners. And being literate in the Pali language is an indispensable means to that end.*

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.

An Opportunity of a Lifetime

It's simply amazing! The response for the SBS fund was overwhelming, with contributions big and small pouring in. Now, we're moving into the first phase proper of the SBS project, i.e. the construction of a *sima* pavilion and 7 *kutis* (huts).

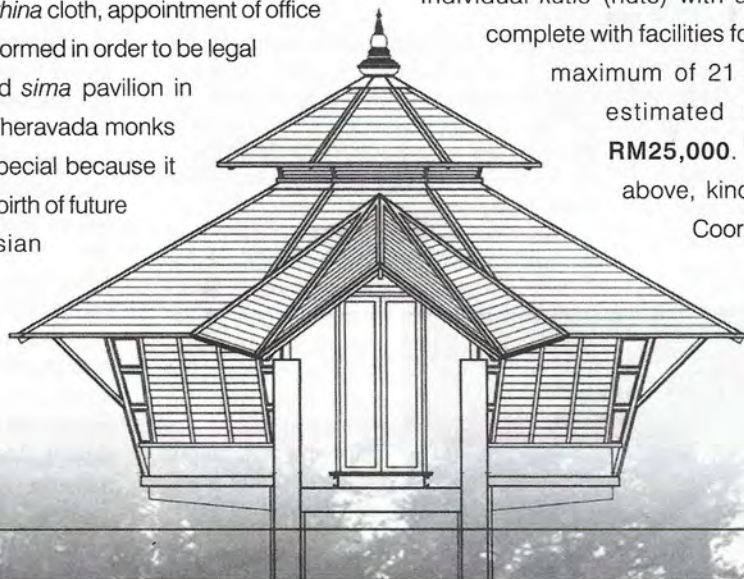
The *sima* is one of the most important "organs" of the *Sasana* (Buddha's Dispensation) and is comparable to a mother's womb, for a *bhikkhu* (Buddhist monk) is "born" in a *sima*. In fact, a *sima* is a demarcated area in which all formal acts of the Sangha, e.g. higher ordination, *uposatha*, *pavarana*, giving of the *kathina* cloth, appointment of office bearers, etc. must be performed in order to be legal and valid. The proposed *sima* pavilion in SBS, our country's first Theravada monks training centre, is very special because it is going to bring forth the birth of future generations of Malaysian Theravada monks.

A rare opportunity to perform Dana

For those who have not yet done so, this is indeed a rare opportunity to share in the merits accrued from the building of the *sima* for SBS. **You** can contribute towards the *sima*. Its cost is estimated at **RM80,000**. Donations are most welcome. Remember, charity is one of the most fundamental virtues of humanity.

Accommodation for monks

Individual *kutis* (huts) with attached bathrooms are complete with facilities for study and meditation. A maximum of 21 *kutis* will be built. The estimated cost of each *kuti* is **RM25,000**. To sponsor any of the above, kindly contact our Financial Coordinator, Mr Ng Kian Chong at 012-5384026.



Giving a dwelling place to the Sangha
 For refuge from the elements
 For protection against wild animals and pests
 For ease and comfort in meditation
 Is praised by the Buddha as the highest gift.
 Therefore a wise person who seeks his own welfare
 Should have charming dwelling places built
 And invite learned monks to stay there.
 With clear joyful mind
 He should offer food, drink, clothing and lodgings
 To them who are honest and upright.
 Then they teach him the Dhamma
 That dispells all sufferings.
 And having realised the Dhamma,
 He becomes free of negative mental states
 And finally attains Nibbana.

The Buddha, in *Vinaya Culavagga* [para 295 & 315]



Typical Kutu

Road Show Impressions

Distance Is Not An Obstacle

"What? Going to the East Coast for road shows?!!" exclaimed some devotees when they first heard of the proposed trip. Yes, it's true. The road show was held in Kuala Terengganu (Thursday, 7 September 2000) and then in Kota Baru, Kelantan, the following night.

Undaunted by the approximately 7-hour journey by road across the Main Range of Peninsular Malaysia, Bhante Aggacitta and a vanload of 11 lay persons left for Kota Baru from Taiping on Tuesday morning, 5 September. A second van, also with 11 lay persons, met up with them at Bodhi Vihara in Kampung Pulau (15 km north of Kuala Terengganu) on Thursday in time for the road show. So far, this was the largest entourage for road shows – besides the usual road show team, there were others going for 'makan angin' or holiday.

At the East Coast, Bhante delivered three talks at Metta Arama, Kota Bahru, entitled "In Transit or Rebirth?" (Parts 1 & 2) and "Spiritual Self-defence." Bhante also gave a talk titled "In Search of Truth" to the Persatuan Pelajar Buddhis of the USM hospital campus in Kubang Kerian.

Bro Jeffrey Ooi, the President of Bodhi Vihara, made special arrangements with the Kuala Terengganu Buddhist Association for the road show to be held at night in their premises. Earlier in the afternoon, Bhante gave a talk in Penang Hokkien at Bodhi Vihara, also on "Spiritual Self-defence."

It was not all work and no play. With the extra days in Kota Baru, the first group of the entourage members was able to visit two Thai cemetery monasteries, founded by Phra Lim and Ajahn Sok respectively.

On Saturday morning, Bhante and the whole entourage visited Ven Javana at his hermitage in Bukit Kecil, Temangan, about an hour's drive southwest of Kota Baru. There, they participated in the lunch dana.

We bade farewell to Kota Baru on Sunday just after noon and reached Taiping at about 8.30pm. Although tired, we were happy that the trip had been a success. Besides making new friends, we received a total of RM5,024 from the two road shows, i.e. RM817 in Kuala Terengganu and RM4,207 in Kota Baru.

Our gratitude and sincere thanks goes to everyone in Kota Baru and Kuala Terengganu for their great support, warm hospitality, and kind generosity. A visit to SBS is just a tinkle away, folks! When the heart is joyful, distance is not an obstacle any more. So, hope to see you lovely people soon! ❖

Doreen Lim

Proud to Help Shape the Future Now

Up went the big white screen, out came the projector, all slides in place and the show was ready to begin. In English or in Hokkien, the Taiping road show veterans are the experts. This time the venue was Kuala Terengganu and Kota Baru. The audience also played their part well, by donating generously.

It was most refreshing to see a group of young medical students from the USM campus in Kubang Kerian coming nightly to listen to Bhante Aggacitta expound the Dhamma at Metta Arama in Kota Baru. Perhaps they might like to pursue a second degree in Sasanaṛakkha after their medical degree? The signs are pointing towards a very good beginning for SBS.

Show time aside, there was fun time too. There were visits to a few forest monasteries and temples. There were walks on the beach and of course, there was food. Our Kota Baru Dhamma brothers and sisters fed us delicious *nasi dagang*, *khaaw jaem* and *laksa* to name a few.

The show has ended but the memories linger on. After six days on the road show, I am now armed with the five spiritual defences¹ to protect myself, and proud that in a very small way I have also helped to shape the future. ❖

Lee Siew Chee

¹One of the Dhamma talks by Ven Aggacitta at Metta Arama was "Spiritual Self-defence", where he spoke on how we could protect ourselves from ghosts, etc. by means of five ways. These are (a) having a blessed object around such as an amulet, Buddha image or chanting beads, (b) reciting scriptural passages or chanting a mantra like "Buddho" or "Namo Amitufo," (c) dedication of merits, (d) radiating metta, and (e) practising mindfulness meditation.



WARM RESPONSE... Metta Lodge Chairman, Patrick Tan introduces Ven Aggacitta to a packed audience.

Road Show Goes South

It was already 8.30 pm and the big room upstairs was filled with people sitting on the floor. Some were waiting quietly while others were talking excitedly. As more people came in some had to sit outside the room near the staircase. What event would attract such a big crowd especially to a place that was still under renovation? They were waiting for the SBS road show to begin at Metta Lodge, Johor Bharu, on 1 November, 2000.

This was the first time I attended this type of presentation, which I found to be very informative and educational. Skillfully done with some Dhamma essence incorporated into it, the presentation captured our attention throughout the one-hour plus session.

On the following night, another presentation was given at Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi. Resident meditation teacher, Sayadaw U Nandasiddhi, visiting Vietnamese bhikkhu, Ven. Nagasena, and a large number of devotees attended the event. However there was a slight hiccup. The bulb of the slide projector would not function when we were setting it up and we could not find any replacement for it in Kota Tinggi. Luckily Sister Sam managed to borrow a slide projector for us in time for the presentation; otherwise Bhante would have given a Dhamma talk instead.

Prior to the presentation, a number of people in Santisukharama were already talking about the SBS project, being very enthusiastic to know more about its progress. So the road show there was timely. A person whom I spoke to seemed very interested and I believe he was planning to join SBS after having settled his mundane affairs. I hope that more people will join SBS and help to prolong the Buddha Sasana. ❖

Manita



IN TUNE WITH NATURE... Lunch dana under the trees in Ven Javana's hermitage

● FROM PAGE ONE

thought. It contained carefully selected passages from the Buddhist scriptures, something worthy to be taken home, and to dip into at random moments for its pearls of wisdom.

As we tucked into the scrumptious array of vegetarian fare, the VIPs delivered their speeches. Brother Eddy Low, Chairman of the organising committee, thanked all who helped to make that night's function a success, especially listing out the key people involved.

Venerable Aggacitta, the Spiritual Director of SBS, then delivered his address. He thanked all SBS well wishers for their overwhelming support and contributions. "I think many Malaysians are very well aware of the urgent need for this project," he said, disclosing that the total donations collected so far had exceeded RM1.4 million. At the end of his short speech, Bhante was invited to light a candle as a symbolic gesture of guidance for the future of the Buddha Sasana in Malaysia.

Next to speak was the chief patron of the dinner, YB Dato' Koay Kar Huah, Penang State Executive Councillor, who stressed the importance of moral and spiritual values to counteract social ills. He hoped that SBS would be able to contribute to building a better society by producing properly trained guides who act as good role models.

Finally, YB Dr Teng Hock Nan, representing the Chief Minister of Penang, delivered the opening address, and conveyed the latter's apologies for not being present as he had an official engagement abroad. Dr Teng stressed the importance of practising tolerance and harmony in the context of our multi-religious country. He concluded by expressing his confidence that sufficient donations will eventually come in to make the project a success.

After the speeches, the opening ceremony began. The other VIPs joined Dr Teng on stage to light candles and pour water, symbolising both the official opening and the sharing of merits with all beings.

Souvenirs were then presented to the VIPs and the performers for the night. This was followed by a multi-media presentation on the need for, concept and purpose of SBS

shown over the giant television screens. It was a very interesting and informative documentary. Many of us were captivated to see monks performing chores such as sweeping, sewing and dyeing their own robes besides other more monkish duties like meditating, studying and going on their alms round.

It was then time for the stage show to begin and what a show it was – a clever potpourri of carefully selected items to cater to the invariably varied tastes of those present.

A cultural performance by the Temple of Fine Arts, Penang, entitled "The Compassionate One" started the ball rolling. It was the story of the Buddha's life enacted in traditional Indian dance routines. Beautifully adorned in traditional costumes, the dancers executed the intricate steps with grace and adeptness.

Next in the programme was a harmonica solo by a member of the Diamond Harmonica Band of Penang, followed by a choral presentation. A choir from the Mahindarama Sunday Pali school delivered their renditions of choral speaking and hymn singing in a harmonious intertwining of voices. They were so at ease that one marvelled at the hours of practice they must have put in.

Then, the show's highlight – the inimitable duo Kenny and Chee of Baba and Nyonya fame. They lived up to and beyond our expectations. The audience was convulsing with laughter throughout their rib-tickling performance. They brought the house down with their witticisms and vocal imitation of the sounds of the sitar and other Indian musical instruments. They were so real that I could have sworn there was a tape recorder hidden somewhere playing the music! At the end of the performance they even managed to weave into their script an appeal for donations to SBS. Wow!

Mellow voices singing in parts brought out the old-time appeal of evergreens when a feminine trio from the Evergreen Fine Arts Society, Penang, stepped on stage. One of



INIMITABLE DUO... stealing the limelight of the whole show.

the trio then sang a solo, followed by a male singer whose rich baritone resonated across the stadium.

Another harmonica solo that followed seemed to be a deliberate arrangement to give vocal chords an interval. This time it was a male artiste playing simultaneously on two harmonicas.

The final item was an allegorical play full of modern symbolism to parallel the Bodhisatta's rejection of worldly pleasures in search of a more meaningful existence. It told the story of Manfred, a young man just back from his studies abroad. During the official opening of his wealthy mother's shopping complex, he witnesses the less savoury side of life when he encounters a woman who scavenges for her living, an Ecstasy addict and a cynic. He turns his back on the worldly life in search of his own utopia.

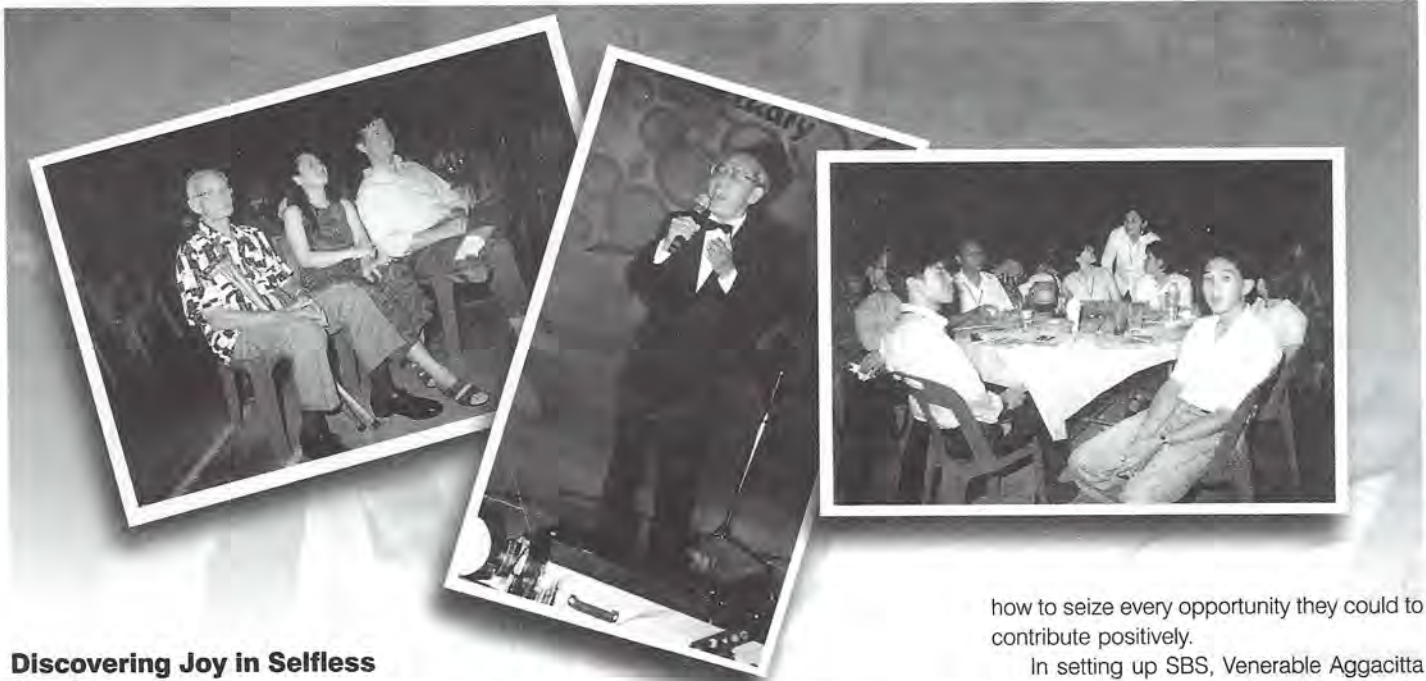
Indeed, the Charity Dinner and Show was a memorable night of splendour, and the fruits of many Dhamma friends' hard work. It was a pity though that more than half the diners left in trickles without waiting for the whole show to finish. Nonetheless, in true showmanship the performers gave of their very best undaunted by a half-empty stadium. When the show ended, a rainbow of lights lit up the stage and smoke billowed up to bid a surrealistic farewell to the audience.

In true Dhamma spirit, brother Eddy Low and his team had done a great job. Sadhu!



Inside Out

SBS Project team-mates reminisce on the Nationwide Charity Dinner & Show (Northern Region) – NCDS(N)



Discovering Joy in Selfless Service

I was coerced to take up the Treasurer's post by my wife, Wei Yean, who literally arm-twisted me into joining this project after seeing me drifting aimlessly in my busy working life without any spiritual inclination. Normally, my free time was spent at the golf course or reading business articles.

Since becoming a member of the NCDS(N) Team under the dynamic leadership of Bro Eddy Low, I have somehow imbibed a bit of the spirit of selfless service. I am most impressed by the members' commitment and sacrifices, especially Bro Andrew Lim's enthusiasm as Marketing Manager!

Serving this noble cause has not changed my lifestyle, but slowly it has drawn me back to walk the spiritual path as there is a certain joy in serving the Sasana, which I intuitively know is more worthwhile than my mundane pursuits.

We have a very good team of capable and selfless Portfolio Managers who sacrificed hours and hours of precious time weekly without a murmur of complaint. This is the power of a noble cause.

I am lucky to have a very supportive and diligent sub-committee. However, one of the best jokes was when my Assistant Treasurer, Sis Joyce Sim, (a qualified accountant with experience, whom I hardly knew before) was requested by Sis Lim Eng Lee to represent me during one of the Main Committee Meetings when I was unavailable. Her first few remarks were "Who is this guy, Ee Hock Huat?" and "Why are the accounts prepared in such a poor manner?" That left the whole committee in stitches. Imagine my assistant

not knowing whom her boss was after more than a month! Can't blame her actually, as I was first introduced to her at a distance when she was on retreat at MBMC and her role was passive then. ❖

Ee Hock Huat

An Opportunity to Do Good

If you were given an opportunity to do good, would you?

I was on a one-week meditation retreat in a little hut when I received a message from Bro Andrew Lim to return his call. Afterwards when I contacted him, I was asked if I could take up the portfolio of manpower and security management in the NCDS(N) project. Seeing this as a great opportunity to do something good, I accepted it immediately. At a later stage, without much effort, I managed to recruit three members to my two sub-committees: Bro Lee Teong Huat, his son and Bro Keow Cheow Boon. They were to assist in the internal and external aspects of security and manpower.

I am personally taken in by the support, commitment, dedication and hard work put in by the organising chairman Bro Eddy Low and all his team members who have strived tirelessly to make this project a success. The workteam has also been quite synergetic and focused in the planning.

Being the oldest in the committee, I was really inspired to see that most of the members who volunteered for this noble cause were young people who already knew

how to seize every opportunity they could to contribute positively.

In setting up SBS, Venerable Aggacitta has great foresight. It is indeed history in the making for the Malaysian Buddhist community. ❖

Khor Aik Poh

Staging a Success

The Upekkha group of Buddhist friends first began to play an active role in this project sometime around June 2000. After discussion we decided to take on the task of Stage Management.

Initially many of us were doubtful and concerned about this project. Firstly, the scope of the project was the biggest the Upekkha group had ever embarked on. We felt that the group, consisting of perhaps 15 active members, was too small to take on such an important role for an event to be held at PISA. We had hardly any experience in stage planning.

Later I learned that the main committee was about the same size as the Upekkha group and I realized that we were short of manpower. The NCDS(N) project needed all the help that it could get.

In the Stage sub-committee, we had some difficulties. Leading the Stage group was a huge responsibility, and because the scope was big, it would be a tremendous amount of pressure for one person to bear. No one wanted the sole responsibility.

On a personal note, in July, I changed department in Intel and was putting in long hours to learn up a new job. For this reason I was not able to fully commit myself to this project. The group finally adopted a flexible

structure with leadership distributed among 3-4 people. Later on when our individual time commitments needed to be changed, this structure proved to be quite useful.

A big problem we faced throughout the planning stage was that several of the performers kept changing. So it was difficult to finalise the inventory of equipment needed for the event. The performers' list was finally fixed 2 months before December. We had to work hard to understand the responsibilities between Program and Stage because many tasks were overlapped by these two portfolios. The need for smooth co-ordination was so great that at the end the two groups could be considered as "combined".

Everyone in the NCDS(N) project put in extra effort in the last few weeks to run that final mile. Although the project did not achieve its original collection target, I think it was a success because of its great marketing achievement: it brought many Buddhists closer together and helped to lay the foundation for future SBS projects. May this effort help us in our struggle to attain Nibbana. ❖

Fong Chin Meng

Doing It With Faith

On the invitation of Sister Lim Eng Lee, I attended the first NCDC(N) meeting at MBMC to see how I could contribute to the success of the project and SBS.

When I entered the meeting room on 19 May 2000, I found that almost 80% of those present were totally new faces. After Bhante Aggacitta explained his concept of COMFIT¹, the time came to delegate responsibilities. It happened that the person who was supposed

to take up the post of Communication Manager turned down the job and everybody thought I was the most suitable person to take it up.

I was a little hesitant about accepting the post for 3 reasons. Firstly, I attended the meeting to see how I could assist, not to lead a sub-committee. Secondly, I did not have any experience heading such a sub-committee. Thirdly, I do not have many friends who are suitable to become members of the communication sub-committee. It was a very difficult decision to make. Surprisingly, I accepted it with a smile, based on one strong belief: that as long as the noble project helps the Dhamma to grow further, to plant its roots in Malaysia for the good of future generations, and as long as I give my best, I will succeed. In short, I just accepted it with *faith* in a good project, believing that my good intention will lead me through it.

I am glad that I gathered teammates who really gave their very best to make things successful. We also received much help from other sub-committee members. The cooperation among all pre-dinner sub-committees was very strong and that really boosted our morale. Also, joining the team gave me the opportunity to know more Buddhist friends from other temples, visit other Buddhist monasteries, meet TIMS members who warmly welcomed us when we visited Taiping, and enjoy the peaceful land of SBS.

Success or failure, ups or downs, I accept them as they are, as I know we have given our very best. ❖

Allan Koh

¹ Stands for Commitment, Open-door policy, Modesty, Fraternity, Integrity and Transparency. It's the spirit guiding the SBS fund-raising project.

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in memory of her late
parents Cheah Eng Guan
and Khoo Siew Kin.

Who's next?



TRIUMPHANT SMILES OF RELIEF...Bro Eddy Low (centre) and team stand tall for a final shot after 6 months of hard work.

North Meets South Along the Middle Way

By Looi Sow Fei



“**E**ast is East and West is West and ne'er the twain shall meet.” So be it – but Venerable Aggacitta showed in his exposition entitled “United We Stand” that this is not the case for the North and the South. The two poles can make overtures to each other, meeting half way along the Middle Path.

Ven Aggacitta was speaking in Hokkien at a function organised by the Nationwide Charity Dinner Committee (North) for mainly members of the non-Theravada Buddhist fraternity (although there seemed to be lots of familiar Theravadin faces in the audience) in Penang on 30 September 2000, in Mahindarama Temple. The aim of the talk was to foster mutual understanding among Buddhists of various traditions, showing that the Northern (Mahayana) and the Southern (Theravada) schools of Buddhism can coexist harmoniously by exercising mutual respect and tolerance based on a liberal understanding of their similarities and differences. This would bring about unity in the Malaysian Buddhist community.

Those who are fortunate enough to know Ven Aggacitta have always found him open-minded. This sentiment was reinforced when we listened to his talk that night. He revealed to the audience that he had been reading Pure Land literature as well as examined their practices and beliefs. He told us that about two weeks ago he had also had a very fruitful meeting with Ven Master Chin Kung (see next article). In both his readings and his meeting with Master Chin Kung, Ven Aggacitta said that he found common ground in both the Northern and Southern schools.

For instance, when Ven Aggacitta enquired of Master Chin Kung about the historical background of Amitabha Buddha, the latter said, “... let us not argue about this... not everyone accepts our Pure Land scriptures... more important to practise charity, loving-kindness, compassion, tolerance and equality.” Ven Aggacitta told the audience he had wholeheartedly agreed with this.

In his readings Ven Aggacitta said he had also found some similarities between the Northern and Southern traditions. One major similarity he elaborated on was the practice of reciting a mantra. For example, Pure Land Buddhists recite ‘Amituo Fuo’ while Theravadins use ‘Buddho’ or ‘Arahant.’ Sometimes the practice is extended beyond tranquillising the mind with one common aim – to make the mind one-pointed and then direct it to watch things as they really are.

Another major Pure Land practice that finds a parallel in Theravada is the observance of precepts and the practice of *metta-karuna* through charity, kindness, restrained speech and unselfish actions. Thus Buddhists of both schools lay emphasis on helping others in order to help themselves attain liberation from samsaric suffering.

Ven Aggacitta pointed out that yogis and monks of the Northern school (especially Tibetan and Zen/Ch’an) also isolate themselves in prolonged solitary practice just as the Theravadins do.

This awareness and understanding of these very basic beliefs and practices common to both schools would help to

harmonise and unite disciples of the two traditions in Malaysia.

Notwithstanding such similarities, the North and South invariably diverge on certain practices and beliefs. Need such differences bring about dissension in the Buddhist fraternity? Ven Aggacitta's answer to this is: “Unity In Diversity.” If disciples of either school try to understand the rationale behind the other's beliefs, look beyond the form of rituals and practices and into the substance of the teachings, then misunderstandings can be avoided and harmony prevail.

To illustrate this point, Ven Aggacitta explained a Vinaya (monastic disciplinary) rule that puts him, as a Theravada monk, in an embarrassing situation when he meets non-Theravada monks. This con-

On 13 September 2000, Sasanaṛakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Spiritual Director, Venerable Aggacitta met Venerable Master Chin Kung of the Pure Land School in Ipoh during the latter's visit to Malaysia. Master Chin Kung, 73, was born in China and ordained at the Lintzi Temple in Taipei, Taiwan at the age of 32. He is the founder of the Pure Land Learning Centres throughout the world. The mission of these centres is to teach Pure Land Studies and the Buddha recitation cultivation method. Master Chin Kung has lectured extensively in many countries and supports the use of modern technology such as the Internet to spread the Buddha's teachings. He also emphasises that Buddhism is an education, not a religion. The Master is also a very keen supporter of harmonious relationship between adherents of different faiths. For example, his centres donate money to support welfare activities conducted by other faiths.

In their meeting in Ipoh, Bhante Aggacitta introduced to Master Chin Kung SBS, the first Theravada monks training centre in Malaysia. The two Venerables also exchanged views on some doctrinal differences between the two Buddhist traditions. When the dialogue began, it reminded me of the Buddha and how it must have been in those ancient times when the Lord taught the Dhamma, usually by answering questions posed by his guests or by exchanging views that soon convinced his listeners.

cerns the practice of *añjali* (putting the palms together in a gesture of respect). Vinaya rules forbid Theravada senior monks to return the greeting of junior monks with the *añjali*, what more to say of non-Theravada monks' greeting. This would naturally be misconstrued as a sign of disrespect. If this 'disrespectful' stance is understood in the light of Theravada Vinaya rules, then misunderstanding and disharmony will not occur.

Another area of misunderstanding is the Theravada resistance to change that arises from the desire to preserve what it believes to be the 'original teachings' of the Buddha. This is in contrast to the Northern school's flexibility in adapting Vinaya rules to accommodate changes in place, time and culture. Monks of the Northern school

in China adapted to Chinese style robes so as to appear less alien; grew their own food to avoid being looked down on as akin to beggars during almsrounds [*piṇḍapāta*]; and 'customised' Buddhism in many other ways so that it was able to take root in China. On the other hand, Theravadins clung on rigidly to *piṇḍapāta*, robes which were unsuitable for the cold Chinese climate and other aspects of the doctrine and discipline. Perhaps this was the reason why the Southern school disappeared in China even though it arrived earlier.

Ven Aggacitta and Ven Chin Kung, both with their open minds, and their ability to see beyond form into substance and understanding of each other's traditions seem to me to be ideal leaders for all present and future monks of their respective traditions.

Unity can then have a chance to prevail.

To achieve this, monks would need to receive a good grounding in their respective traditions to enable them to understand not only the beliefs and practices of their own traditions, but also that of another.

I believe that monks graduating from SBS in the future under the tutelage of Ven Aggacitta will be able to achieve this. With Ven Aggacitta's profound understanding of the Buddhist scene in Malaysia and his open-mindedness, we have no doubt that the new generation of monks will pave the way to a more unified Malaysian Buddhist fraternity. Buddhists of the Northern and Southern schools will then walk the Middle Way together in harmony – a united minority front in a majority Muslim country. ❖



THE SBS WAY?

by Ang Siew Mun

Here we are now, after some 2,500 years, two Sakyan sons of the Buddha, both from a different tradition, coming together to initiate communication and to foster more understanding between the Theravada Tradition and the Pure Land School. I feel the time for such dialogue is long overdue for leaders of all Buddhist traditions as globalisation sets in. With a little support and understanding from lay people, both traditions cannot help but bridge doctrinal

differences by the way they interpret the Dhamma. Some might ask: "Why is it important to bridge differences? Why not just forgive and accept our differences?" Although it's well and good to forgive and accept, it's also important to remember that the Dhamma we inherited from the Buddha is profound. So, doctrinal differences between Buddhist traditions can sometimes be just different aspects of the same thing. An example that comes to my mind is the

simile of several blind men trying to figure out what an elephant is.

How then can we bridge doctrinal differences? Firstly, we must be open enough to direct our minds to interpret these teachings according to our experience in meditation. For example, Pure Land teachings tell us that when the practitioners reach Sukhavati¹, Amitabha Buddha will be there to receive them.

Sukhavati is also known as the Western Pure Land. According to Pure Land teachings, it is a world created by Amitabha Buddha. It is an ideal place of cultivation and those who are born there are no longer subject to rebirth.

The Theravada teachings, on the other hand, quote Gotama Buddha as saying that the Lord does not say whether he exists, does not exist, neither exists nor does not exist after death. Before I try to reconcile these seemingly contradictory doctrines, let us look at the similarities in the Theravada Tradition and the Pure Land School. Both the traditions share a common understanding of what 'Buddha' means. It means 'awakened,' that is, awakened to the nature of phenomena. They also share the same idea that liberation is in our own hands. "Sukhavati" as explained by Master Chin Kung, is Nibbana. Having defined these premises, let us now interpret the seemingly contradictory teachings between the Pure Land School and the Theravada Tradition. When the Pure Land School says that Amitabha Buddha is now in Sukhavati waiting to receive beings reborn there, we can interpret it as saying that when practitioners finally reach Sukhavati (i.e. Nibbana), they see the Buddha. The 'Buddha' mentioned here would not be physical. This is very much in line with the Theravada position that when we see the Dhamma, we see the Buddha, no matter where we are. However, it is important to note that this is an interpretation of Pure Land teachings from the Theravada perspective. It would be most interesting to see how the Pure Land School interprets the Theravada teachings!

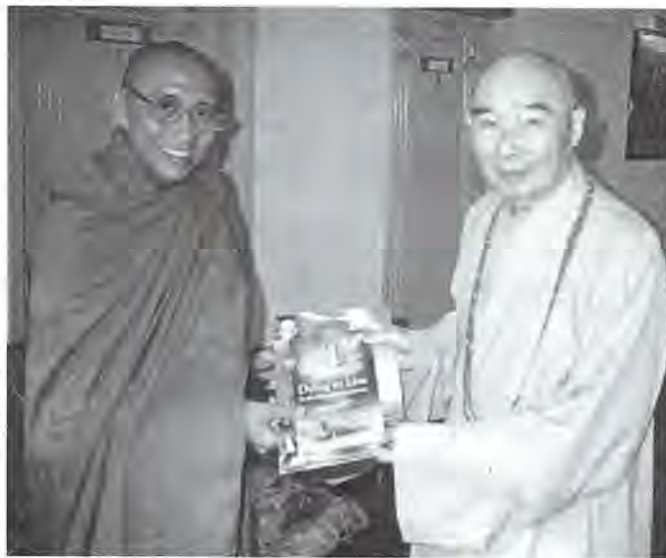
Anyway, there is one point that I am still unclear about. The Pure Land practitioners believe Amitabha Buddha had made a vow to lead them to Sukhavati when they are about to die. This is besides him waiting to receive them there. According to one practitioner, the vow was so great that even Mara, the tempter, couldn't transform himself

into the image of Amitabha Buddha. Knowing thus, some Pure Land School's teachers would instruct their dying disciples to wait for the image of Amitabha Buddha to appear before they leave their bodies to follow him to Sukhavati. Looking from this angle, it seems to me that Sukhavati is a physical plane of existence and that Amitabha Buddha is still a Bodhisatta perfecting himself. This is because he is still trying to fulfil his vow of saving beings. How this teaching can be reconciled with the Pure Land School's own definition of 'Buddha' as 'awakened' is something I'd like to know.

Essentially, I feel that there are not many differences between the Theravada Tradition and the Pure Land School teachings when we compare their actual practice of Dhamma itself. For example, both traditions emphasise the keeping of the five precepts for lay people. They also emphasise one-pointedness of mind, and mindfulness in the four postures. In the walking meditation, for example, the Theravada Tradition uses "left-right" or "Bud-dho" as a way to mentally note body movements. In the Pure Land School, they use "Na-mo A-mi-tuo-fo."

The dialogue between the two Venerables was quite fruitful in that it cleared some doctrinal differences between the two traditions, such as why the Pure Land School said Gotama Buddha attained enlightenment by reciting "Na-mo A-mi-tuo-fo." It seems that this teaching originated from a Chinese Master some 300 years ago. The dialogue also exposed weaknesses that can perhaps be rectified if both parties continue to have

such on-going communication. A clear weakness is the fact that the Venerables were not clear enough of each other's intentions when the dialogue got going. This was despite the fact that Bhante Aggacitta explained the reason why he wanted the dialogue before it began. This situation occurred perhaps because they don't know each other at all and had only met on the day of the dialogue. Bhante Aggacitta might have heard of the Pure Land teachings but he does not know who Master Chin Kung is



"MAHINAYANA" EXCHANGE... It's a good heart that really matters.

and how he teaches. On the other hand, Master Chin Kung too might have heard of the Theravada Tradition but he does not know Bhante Aggacitta as a person and the way he thinks or teaches. So, when the dialogue was in progress, one can even interpret the questions posed by Venerable Aggacitta as "challenging Pure Land teachings" rather than as trying to foster mutual understanding between the two traditions' differences in belief, interpretation and practices of the Buddha's teachings.

Therefore, a dialogue that is effective, I feel, can only come about when we have established trust. "Trust" here means the two

In the dialogue, the Master (Chin Kung) said that if we have a lot of attachments and only care for ourselves (*xin liang xiao*, literally 'have a small heart'), then we are practising "Hinayana." But if we are broad-minded and do service for others as we ourselves cultivate the Path (*xin liang da*, literally 'have a big heart') then we are practising "Mahayana" or the greater vehicle.

Venerables know doctrinal differences are okay and acceptable in view of how the Buddha-Dhamma had developed over so many years. This is only possible if both leaders meet often and realise that both parties intend to learn from each other.

Then again, there is the issue of language. Since many of the people in the Theravada Tradition speak English only and not Mandarin and the Pure Land School adherents speak Mandarin only and very little English, it's sometimes difficult to bridge this gap in communication. The Dhamma is so profound, and the concepts used in both English and Mandarin can carry connotations that can cause much misunderstanding. The possible solution is to have a very good interpreter but even then this has weaknesses. The interpreter who translated for Venerable Master Chin Kung in the dialogue with Venerable Aggacitta was good but too polite, so much so that he felt it difficult to translate some of his Master's very candid message to Bhante Aggacitta. As an observer, one could see that the interpreter felt himself placed in a dilemma.

In the dialogue, for example, Venerable Master Chin Kung had used the term "Xiao Cheng" (Hinayana or the lesser vehicle) in Mandarin and the interpreter translated it as "Theravada." This is problematic because the Master may have really meant "Hinayana" as opposed to "Theravada." And then, we would have to explain to the Master that his usage of this term is offensive to most people who follow the Theravada Tradition. We might even have to explain a little on why it is no longer applicable today. The Master would then have an opportunity to speak his mind on why he still used the term "Xiao Cheng". Perhaps he didn't know it's offensive. Perhaps he would even decide not to use it anymore because he realised that it does not promote harmony between the Buddhist traditions.

Besides, Master Chin Kung may not have meant that the Theravada Tradition is "Hinayana." In the dialogue, the Master said that if we have a lot of attachments and only care for ourselves (*xin liang xiao*, literally 'have a small heart'), then we are practising "Hinayana." But if we are broad-minded and

do service for others as we ourselves cultivate the Path (*xin liang da*, literally 'have a big heart') then we are practising "Mahayana" or the greater vehicle. Clearly, the Theravada teachers also do a great number of services for the laity. They too have big hearts! So, there is a need to bridge this kind of miscommunications when we have a dialogue. If not, the dialogue becomes a mere window-dressing, with both parties learning very little from each other.

At the end of the dialogue, Bhante Aggacitta and Master Chin Kung had a photo call and exchanged souvenirs, consisting of Dhamma books and tapes. Venerable Aggacitta passed along his book, *Dying to Live*, and the SBS pamphlets to Master Chin Kung.

Would this inter-tradition dialogue be a precursor to many more of such dialogues? Would this be the way SBS harmonises the various Buddhist traditions in Malaysia and the world? Over to you, Bhante! ❖

coming soon

	1. Single-track CD	2. VHS & VCD
<p>Guardian of the Sāsana A song dedicated to Sāsānārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary</p> <p>Music score by <i>Dr Victor Wee</i> with guitar accompaniment by <i>Jamie Wilson</i> Lyrics by <i>Florence Tan</i></p> <p>Widely acclaimed as a spiritually touching song.</p>	<p>Sāsānārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary A Documentary on the need for, concept and purpose of SBS</p> <p>Directed and produced by <i>Tan Joo Lan</i></p> <p>Educational, informative and inspiring.</p>	

Lights! Camera! Action!

The cameras rolled to take action shots for a multimedia production.

It was 4 August 2000 on a blazingly hot afternoon. But we were not complaining. There were just sighs of relief and we uncrossed our fingers. The production crew from Kuala Lumpur finally made it to Taiping after a four-hour delay. Their van had decided to stall in Rawang causing an upset to a carefully planned schedule, notwithstanding the best-laid plans for monks and men.

The SBS fund-raising committee had decided to bring some Hollywood-style excitement to the sleepy-hollow of Taiping. The video shoot, aimed at educating the general public, was about to begin after weeks of planning and preparation. The

Lim Lay Hoon reports on how 'HOLLYWOOD'



location? SBS site, Khemarama and TIMS premises. The theme: "Monkish Activities."

Volunteer producer-director-script writer, Sis Tan Joo Lan set about the task of writing the script in June. With guidance from Ven Aggacitta, the script was meticulously edited and rewritten several times before the final version was ready for shooting to take off. Bro Goh Keat Soon and I were appointed liaison persons. Our duties were mainly to get ready the props and cast required for the shooting. The task of getting people to be "actors" and "actresses" was simple. No special talents were needed nor was there a need for auditioning. Those approached were more than eager to help. Six monks from Mi Tor See, MBMC and Vivekavana, Venerables Vipulatissa, Katapuñña, Radha, Vayamo, Dhammavidu and (samanera) Varasami, graciously accepted our invitation to help without much ado. Sis Joo Lan and Mr Randolph Wee, the owner of a multimedia

studio, made a reconnaissance trip to Taiping one week before the actual camera shoot.

Getting the props ready climaxed to an almost feverish pace on the eve of the shoot. Here was where the fun and exciting adventures began. Most of the props had to be transported up to Khemarama, a low hill where Ven Aggacitta is residing. Among the paraphernalia were lecture-room chairs for a classroom scene, a big 'wok' to boil the dye solution for dyeing robes, a gas tank, gas stoves, firewood, a portable sewing machine, brooms, saw, axe, monks' bowls, etc. Volunteer helpers comprising members of TIMS had gathered at the centre on Thursday, 3 August at 3.30pm. The smaller items were loaded onto a *Kembara* 4WD while the bigger and bulkier items were transported by a rickety police jeep belonging to SBS. It was no easy endeavour manoeuvring this scrap metal salvaged from a junkyard in Ipoh

at a bargain of RM5,000 and given a new lease of life by SBS. The driver, Bro Lim Poh Eng, heaved and puffed as he turned the steering wheel clockwise and anti-clockwise to keep the jeep on-course. "I've driven many types of vehicles, including a lorry, but this one is by far the most challenging! Ohh! I couldn't lift my arms last night," Bro Lim told me the next morning. This 4WD rattled and crawled its way through Taiping town and laboriously climbed up the Khemarama hill. What a relief it was when it finally reached its destination, never mind that it almost seemed like eternity! After setting up the props and sprucing up the surroundings, we left Khemarama when the sun was setting in the distant horizon.

We had prayed that the weather would not let us down but what greeted us on 4 August was a grey morning. The overcast sky threatened to rain. Then, it started to drizzle. But before it could gain momentum,

the wind mysteriously came to blow the dark menacing clouds away. The warm rays of the sun came out in full force and the day turned bright and sunny. Meanwhile all the six Venerables from Penang, Bukit Berapit and Pulau Pangkor had arrived punctually at TIMS' premises. The crowd of devotees who had come to perform dana was waiting in eager anticipation. Then the phone rang.

windows of their homes as we went about our business of "acting" outside their very doorsteps.

As soon as shooting at the first location was completed, cast and crew swiftly proceeded to Khemarama. Six 4WDs helped to ferry all the people involved together with the video equipment. By the time we reached the location, about 10 people were already

hours, they never lost their patience, never seemed to tire. They remained calm, collected and absorbed in what they were doing with hardly a glance at the clock. Ah! So this is what they call professionalism and dedication at work!

At 8.00am the following day, 5 August, shooting continued at the TIMS premises. The members gathered once again to do chanting. Other shots were also made for background effects. Some of us even turned instant graphic artists then. The children too joined in the fun of helping to form the SBS letters using flowers. Ven Aggacitta had suggested we use the hibiscus because of its Malaysian identity. However, as hibiscus flowers wilt as soon as they are plucked, we opted for orchids and chrysanthemums instead. I was particularly enthralled by the explanation of the symbolism of a shot showing the stringing of flowers to form a garland. According to Sis Joo Lan, Ven Aggacitta had explained to her that the Buddha had used the simile of a garland of flowers to illustrate the importance of the Vinaya. A loose bunch of flowers can be easily dissipated by the wind, but not a garland of flowers because they are held together by a string. Likewise, the Vinaya regulates the conduct of monks so that they can live in communal peace and harmony to perpetuate the Sasana.

In the afternoon, the video crew went up to the SBS site to take shots of the building areas and the landscape. A 'lip-synch' shot of the prime mover of SBS, Ven Aggacitta, was also taken with the majestic hills surrounding SBS forming the perfect backdrop.

Just before the crew packed their equipment to leave for Penang to continue their shooting, Mr Randolph Wee, a born-again Christian, caught us all by surprise when he folded his palms in *añjali* and bade farewell to Ven Aggacitta in a respectful manner. Noticing our surprised looks, Randolph remarked, "Well, I have to learn too." If Randolph's response is any indication, then this video production promises to be an effective educational tool.

We hope that as the show unfolds, those viewing it will be as inspired as those who had put in their time and energy to produce it – for ours is a labour of love. ❖

comes to Taiping



It was Sis Joo Lan. "We will be delayed. We are still at Rawang. Our van refuses to move."

Four hours later, Sis Joo Lan appeared with her crew and apologised profusely for the unforeseen delay. "The van had to be towed back to KL and we had to take another van," she explained. Perhaps we were at fault too – we prayed for good weather in Taiping but forgot to pray for their safe and smooth journey!

The first scene taken of monks going on mock alms round in the village (because it was well past 3pm by then) was completed in a jiffy. It must be one of the easiest assignments for Sis Joo Lan and her team as there were no cuts and re-takes at all. The small village chosen for this scene is located opposite the TIMS premises. The sudden appearance of strangers in their midst aroused the curiosity of the villagers – enough to make them peep politely from the

busy working on the dye. Some were engaged in cutting the pith of the jackfruit tree trunk while others were stirring a big cauldron of boiling water for preparing the dye solution. It looked like a movie set for "The monk and I"! While waiting for the dye solution to reach the right colour, shots of monks reading and meditating were taken. After that, shots were taken of monks dyeing robes, firing and polishing alms bowls, sweeping and clearing the compound. Then followed the classroom scene and individual monks relating their difficulties of training abroad. The last scene showed monks sewing their own robes.

Filming for the day finally ended at 9.30pm. It was already pitch dark at Khemarama. On our way downhill, this time a more pleasant ride on an open-roofed Suzuki jeep, I contemplated the day's events. I had watched in awe at how the director and her crew worked. Despite the long and irregular

Shapes & Figures

SBS supporters must have been trying to figure out how we are shaping the future now – now that we are proud of the figures in the TIMS (SBS Project Fund), which have grown to be so shapely within such a short space of time. This section presents, for the first time, an inside picture of the latest SBS developments in building works and financial standing.

THE JOURNEY AHEAD

As the saying goes, a thousand-mile journey starts with a single step. In the journey to achieve our dreams for SBS, we have taken many giant steps: from project inception to conception, planning and implementation.

Dr Soo Kian Sin looks at what we have achieved so far and the challenges ahead.

ENGINEERING CHALLENGES

Situated at the foothills of Larut, the location of SBS could not be more ideal. However, development in rugged terrains and rolling hills often presents tremendous engineering challenges. Problems such as erosion, slope stability, access and logistics are always present and real. With stringent project requirements of

- minimum disturbance to environment
- suitable site selection
- orientation of buildings to harmonise with nature
- short planning-design-construction time

coupled with limited funds and insufficient engineering data, the project demands very detailed consideration of and judgement on various inter-related aspects. Often, as new requirements are introduced, the engineering aspects will have to be changed accordingly.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

External Road

Access to the site is through a cemetery and oil palm plantation using the existing laterite

road. The distance from the foothill to SBS site is about 1 km. Near the upper reaches, the access road had been formed mainly by cutting into the existing hill contours, resulting in steep gradients and causing severe erosion problems because proper drainage was not provided. These conditions are often hazardous during the wet weather, as the road is soft and slippery. Though costly, the only practical solution to the problem will be to construct a reinforced concrete road with appropriate shoulder drains to properly direct water away to prevent erosion.

During the planning stage, it was agreed that transportation of construction materials would be a major cost item because of the rugged terrain. To optimise cost, SBS would supply and transport all construction materials and sub-contract out the labour. Two backhoes are being used for the transportation of construction materials such as sand, aggregate, cement, and wire steel mesh from the foothill. This aspect of the work is managed by the Building Development Manager, Ooi Eng Huat, with great success.

Earthwork consisted of filling erosion gullies, minor trimming of side slopes and grading. This was carried out prior to casting

the concrete road, which follows the existing laterite road alignment. Concrete was mixed at the site. To improve skid resistance, grooves were also formed in the concrete road. The "famous" rain of Taiping also greatly hampered construction work. There were several occasions when heavy rain washed out newly constructed drains and damaged the newly cast concrete road. In spite of this, about 1 km of concrete road and drains have been constructed. The team of dedicated workers certainly deserve high commendations for a job well done.

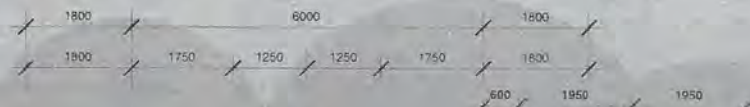
Internal Road

Internal roads within the SBS property boundary will also have to be upgraded to prevent further deterioration, and to facilitate mobilisation of construction equipment and materials to proposed building locations scattered throughout the site. In total, about 700 m of reinforced concrete road will be constructed.

Compared to the external road, the internal road terrain is even more rugged and undulating. Additional problems besides those encountered on the external road include

- presence of granite boulders that require blasting for removal
- steeper cut and road gradient
- sharper corners which may require trimming and grading to enable smoother vehicle access
- more severe erosion problems.

The construction of the internal roads was delayed for a few months because of the difficulty of getting a blasting permit from the authorities. As of this writing, the construction is in progress and is expected to be completed before or shortly after the Chinese New Year.



Electricity and Water Supply

Electrical supply will be provided by Tenaga Nasional Berhad. Installation of power poles from the foothill to the site started on 11 December, 2000, and electrical supply would have been obtained shortly afterwards but for the shortage of two poles and electrical cables.

Unlike electrical supply, municipal water supply to the site would be much more costly and difficult, requiring numerous pump stations. However, several natural springs at and near SBS provide ideal sources of water supply because of their elevations and crystal clear water quality. Site clearing and construction of retention ponds and a water treatment reservoir have been completed. Presently, construction of a water collection tank is in progress. The filtered water will be piped to individual buildings, each with its own storage tank. After the completion of the construction works, the areas around the water sources will be landscaped.

FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

Facilities development is divided into 2 phases. Phase 1 is to include the Abbot's vihara, 6 kutis, a dam with a pond for a water sima pavilion, and workers' quarters. Phase 2 will be implemented later; it includes the remaining kutis, a library, classrooms, a multi-purpose hall, a workshop-reception-publication office, guest lodges, a sick ward, and a store.

Abbot's Vihara and Kutis

The undulating terrain offers limited flat ground for construction. So, most structures will be located on hill slopes and specialist geotechnical input will be required to address slope stability, foundation and erosion

problems. Slope stabilization work is usually expensive. However, due to the hilly terrain, cutting and filling as well as some stabilization works are inevitable at some locations.

Site selection as well as architectural and structural designs for the vihara and kutis have been completed. Most of the components will be pre-fabricated to overcome transportation difficulties and inclement weather conditions. Footpaths will be constructed to connect each individual kuti to the internal access road.

Negotiations with the contractor on the pricing and construction of the buildings are currently in progress. The construction of the kutis is expected to commence shortly after the Chinese New Year festive season.

Water Sima Pavilion

The water sima design required the construction of a water retention structure. The ideal location is the streambed located at the eastern portion of the site. A 2.5-meter (8.2 feet) high retaining wall will be constructed across the stream to dam up an area of roughly 400 square meter (4300 square feet). Stream diversion was carried out to allow site clearing and excavation works for the water sima foundation and dam to proceed. This aspect of work has been completed. The construction of the dam is expected to commence after the Chinese New Year, but the water sima can only be constructed after sufficient kutis have been completed. This is because several monks will

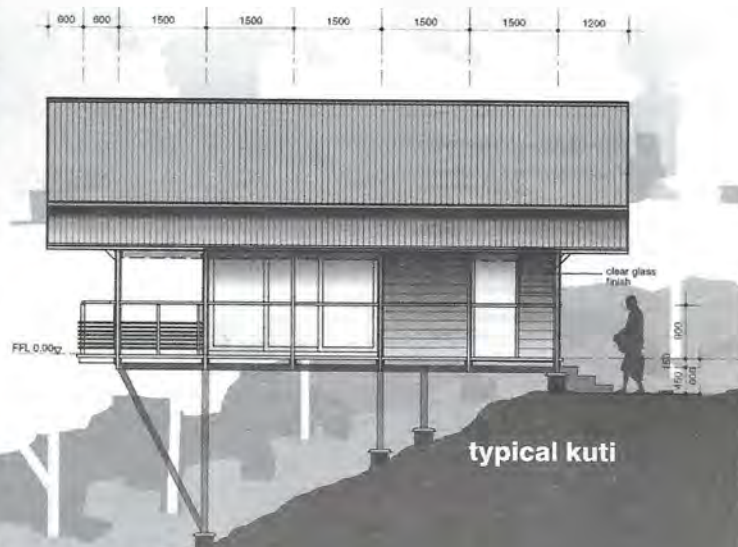
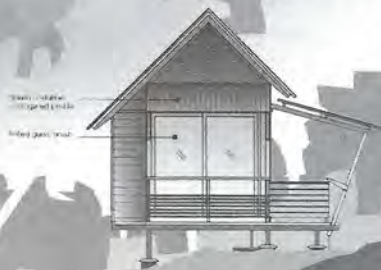
have to be invited to reside in SBS for a few days to carry out some formal procedures to make a new sima.

Others

Erosion and minor slope distresses are prevalent across the site. Bio-engineering approaches will be adopted to tackle these problems. The Terra-Control method where biodegradable chemical is utilised to promote vegetation growth will be used to control erosion. Erosion protection mats will also be employed at critical areas to stabilise minor slope failures.

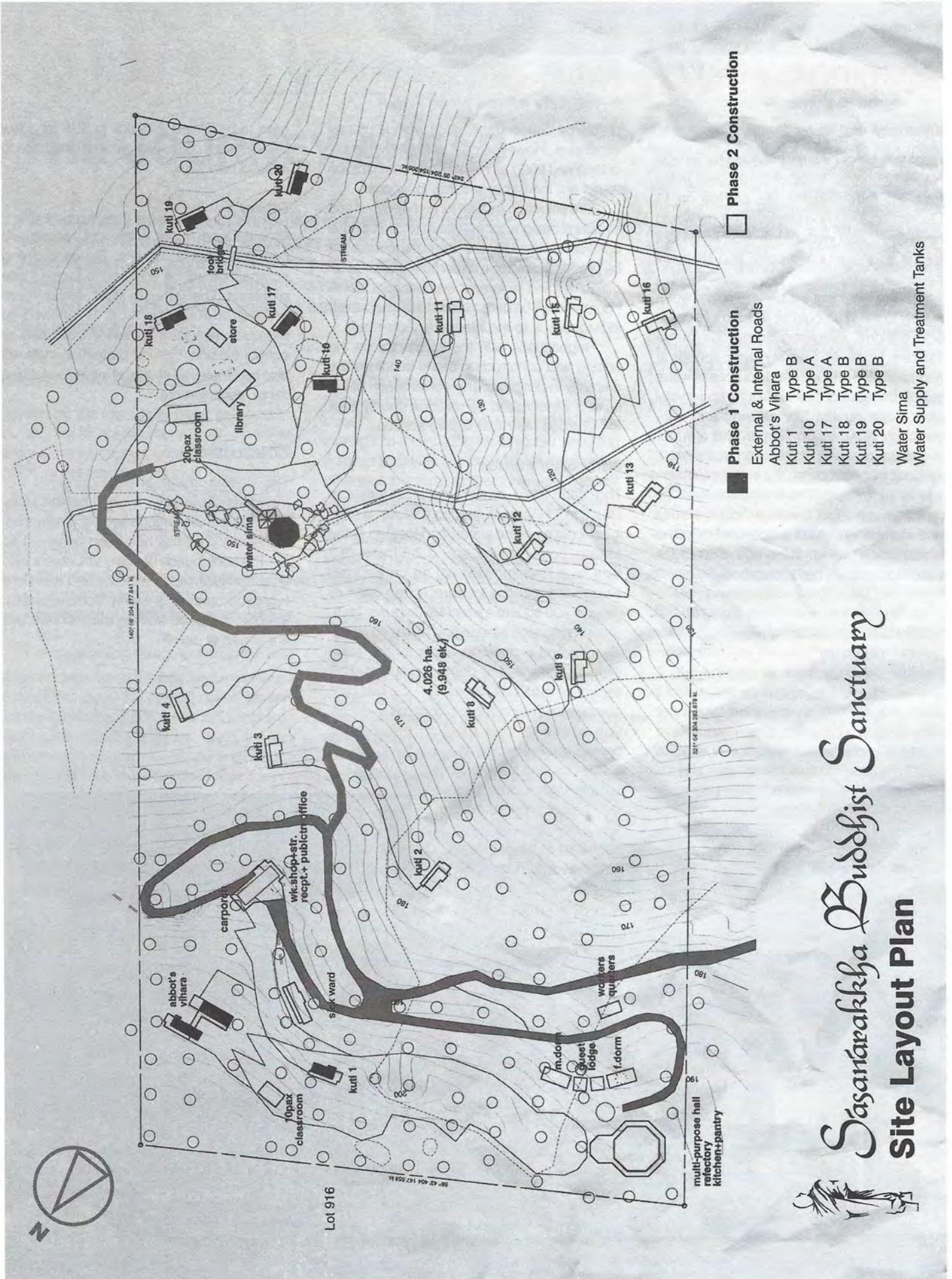
CONCLUSION

The development of SBS presents tremendous challenges. Though behind schedule due to many unforeseen circumstances, significant progress has been achieved so far. The contribution of many volunteers who unselfishly devoted their time and effort in a teamwork setting is highly commendable. Keep up the good work as many challenges are ahead of us. ❖



Born in Taiping in 1962, **Soo Kian Sin** obtained his PhD in Geotechnical Engineering with Civil Engineering Materials from the Iowa State University, USA. He was formerly the Chief Engineer of PLUS and is now the Manager of Technical Services with OPUS International Consultants. He has made more than a dozen site visits to SBS as our consultant geotechnical engineer and is one of the most dedicated and pro-active members of our B&D Team.

Shapes & Figures



Phase 1 Construction
 External & Internal Roads
 Abbot's Vihara
 Kuti 1 Type B
 Kuti 10 Type A
 Kuti 17 Type A
 Kuti 18 Type B
 Kuti 19 Type B
 Kuti 20 Type B

Phase 2 Construction

Water Sima
 Water Supply and Treatment Tanks

Sāsanārakkha Buddhist Sanctuary
Site Layout Plan



Shaping the Future Now

An Interview with SBS Building Development Manager

By Lim Lay Hoon

Mr Ooi Eng Huat, the Building Development manager of SBS, seems tailor-made for the post. A successful housing developer by profession, he has secured himself a comfortable niche in the business community of Taiping. He is also the owner of the orchard on which sits Khemarama, Ven Aggacitta's present residence. His youthful looks and lean frame belies a hidden assertiveness, self-assurance and all-pervasive optimism that were revealed when the subject of the development of SBS was broached on 11 October 2000.

He waves us into his no-frills office, and as Sis Looi Sow Fei and I lean back in our chairs, the phone rings. A prospective client enquires about his new housing project. Phone call over, we waste no time in delving into our mission: How is the building development of SBS progressing? Without even a moment's pause, Ah Huat, as he is fondly called, eloquently narrates off the cuff.

"Where drainage is concerned, we've done more than 1,000 ft of the in-situ concrete drain [average dimension: 2ft x 1½ ft] along the approach road to the site designated to be the SBS office," he said.

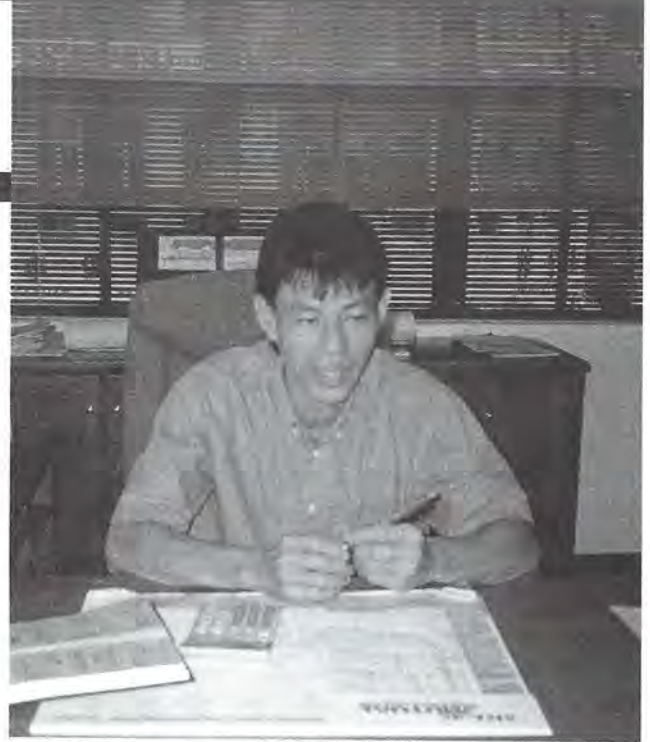
"What's in-situ?" interjects Sow Fei.

"It means making the cast for the drain on site," he explains and then goes on about the concrete road of which he says, "We've

finished 1,300 ft." The road [average dimension: 13ft x 4in with BRC#A8 (size of iron mesh reinforcement used in the paved road)] is built to enable a smooth and easy drive for 4WDs from the foothill of SBS to where the administrative office will be located (presently where the caretaker's house stands). He tilts his head slightly to make a quick mental calculation of the extent of completion. "80%" is his definite reply. He continues confidently, "The concrete road and drainage will be fully completed by the beginning of November."

Ah Huat then shows us an official letter from Jabatan Galian Perak dated 18 August 2000 that gave the approval to blast some big boulders at SBS. These boulders sit alongside the laterite approach road near the designated office building. Other boulders are in the brook where the water sima is to be built.

"We've also got permission from the state police department to buy explosives to blast the rocks. Blasting work will be done next week. Once the rocks have been blasted, that would clear the hurdle to the completion of the road and drain. And as soon as the building plans for the dam and water sima are ready, I'll call for quotations, select the contractor and construction work can start.



MR NO PROBLEM... "I will give my best to make SBS successful."

The internal road leading down from the approach road to the water sima area is on quite a steep slope at 30° gradient so we'll have to cut it down to a gradient of 20°," reveals Ah Huat. This gives us a peek not only into the up-coming building developments of SBS but also a peek into a multi-lateral, methodical mind that works like clockwork.

Try holding a conversation with Ah Huat and believe me his overflowing optimism and positive attitude will just rub off on you. This "no problem" man only sees the silver lining behind every cloud.

"I've not encountered any problem so far." Only on second thoughts does he say, "Except for the weather." The weather again! Construction work began in early August but halfway through, the South West monsoon winds came in full force bringing ferocious rain every afternoon for the whole month of September. The wind and rain are showing signs of retreating but the rain has left its mark behind. To illustrate, he points to a photograph that shows the potholes in all their glory. Although plastic sheets were used to cover the road surface, strong winds displaced them and exposed the newly paved road to the ravages of the merciless rain. "But it's okay. The damage is minor. The holes aren't very deep and they can be patched up so there's no cause for worry," says Mr "No-Problem", making light of the matter.

Another surmountable problem, thanks to the persuasive and inter-personal skills of Ah Huat, is the reluctance of the tractor company to allow its tractors to work on the



HIGHWAY TO NIBBANA?... New concrete road up to SBS reflects the quality of planning, design and construction.

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Shapes & Figures

hilly terrain of SBS. This is because of the heavy wear and tear on the vehicles. However, there are now two tractors at work on SBS land!

Next, we arrive at the inevitable question of cost. How much has been spent so far? Referring to his SBS file, he quotes the figure of RM58,418 for construction expenditure of which RM15,000 is labour cost. Besides, someone from Petaling Jaya had donated 501 bags of cement while a Taipingite donated 50 bags. "The source of water for mixing cement is a house located near the foothill of SBS belonging to a TIMS member, Sis Ooi Cheng Suan. Construction workers have been going to her house daily to get water. But now, since the upper reaches of the road is nearer one of the springs behind SBS, we've begun to use the spring water."

Just two days before our meeting, Ah Huat was busy with the launching of one of his housing projects. We wonder how he manages his time between his own projects and SBS.

"It is more than two months now since construction work on the SBS project started. In the beginning, I was at SBS almost every morning for half a day. When things were running smoothly, I delegated the job to my brother who is there for almost the whole day every day. My service at SBS did not interfere with my own business as I carried my 'office' [waving his mobile phone] to the SBS site."

Having exhausted our queries, we ask Ah Huat if he has anything more to add. These are his words of inspiration: "I will give my best to make SBS successful!"

That's the spirit, Ah Huat! We leave his office without a shadow of doubt that the building development of SBS couldn't be in more capable hands.

[Just before this issue of Sasanarakkha is sent to the printers we are informed that the following have been completed:

- the approach road and drainage
- the internal road and drainage to the site for the multi-purpose hall
- earthwork at the site for the water sima
- 50% of the drainage construction to the site for the water sima. Sunset Villa Sdn Bhd, which has been awarded the contract to do all building works at SBS, is on the verge of starting construction of the dam, water sima, and kutis. SBS is now a hive of activity.] ❖



RESERVED... Tying an immature durian to its branch so that it won't fall off the slope when it drops.

SBS Orchard & Landscaping

Chiu Sheng Bin

SBS land is shaded by a full stand of young, bearing durian trees, in all 281 trees, not to mention the *petai*, *cempedak-nangka* cross, *langsai*, and *rambutan* trees and even a handsome *assam gelugor* tree (see if you can find it).

This season (December 2000/January 2001), the durians and cempedak/nangka fruited prolifically. The durian trees are all clonal durians including D24 and *Ang Hea*. We are still identifying the various clones. To do that properly, we have to taste the fruits from all the trees, a job that none is complaining! We suspect that the cempedak trees are actually cempedak-nangka cross when we find the trees fruiting non-seasonally. Cempedak trees bear seasonal fruits while nangka are non-seasonal. Since we have cempedak-looking fruits that bear throughout the year, we think it is a crossbreed.

So far, the landscape and orchard maintenance team has numbered all the durian trees and located them on a spot plan. Each durian tree is tagged with an aluminium plate that has a number in red paint. All diseased trees have been treated regularly, but so far, we have lost 5 trees to stem canker disease and 1 to landslide. A big challenge is to protect the durian fruits from fruit borer damage without having to carry out any spraying. This we managed quite successfully by bagging the small durian fruits with newspaper bags suspended from a long pole. It takes some skill and experience (and some stiff necks) as the SBS die-hard helpers find out. But the fun is in the doing as Ng Kian Chong, Chen Sew Kian, Saw Kheng Hong (our orchard worker) and Tan Heng Ghee (a volunteer from Penang) found out. As an added insurance, we have planted the natural insecticide tree, the neem (*Azadirachta indica*) to deter insects

and termites from going near the durian trees.

Initially our biggest setback was finding a reliable, experience orchard worker. In the beginning there were two unreliable workers, one after the other. We were third time lucky with Saw. Meanwhile

many volunteers rallied to help in taking a census of the durian trees, labelling them and bagging the durian and cempedak-nangka fruits. Andy, Andrew, Mr and Mrs Chin, Ah Chew the 4-D caster, Ah Seng the 'koay kak' seller and the Tan brothers from Penang are just a handful.

Landscaping SBS takes on a new challenge – erosion control of exposed slopes due to building development – because of its super-hilly terrain. For that, we are helping Dr Soo Kian Sin, our geotechnical engineering consultant, to prevent erosion by maintaining the slope vegetation and planting vetiver grass and creeping legume plants as anti-erosion agents. In addition, we have produced some preliminary landscape plans and plant species to beautify the compounds of the multipurpose hall, abbot's vihara, water sima and kutis. An ornamental nursery has been started recently in SBS, under the shade of a big durian tree beneath the first kuti, to propagate the plants required, such as weeping willow, pokok kembang pukul lapan, camwood tree, duranta gold, jasmine, vetiver grass and Indian cork tree. Lim Hooi Siang, another of our landscape consultants, is generously assisting in the landscaping project.

We still need plenty of plants such as the spider lily, water lily, lotus and different colours of heliconia and would certainly welcome contributions from devotees and well wishers. We hope to plant as many trees and plants collected by devotees and well wishers and watch them grow as SBS matures. By so doing, we will feel closer to SBS whenever we visit. ❖

INNOVATIVE... Bagging durians to frustrate fruit borers.



you're just great!

We wish to express our heartfelt appreciation of the selfless service given by all volunteers in the building development of SBS especially the following professionals

Building Development Manager Ooi Eng Huat

Water Supply & Treatment Michael Woo Wye Hon

Project Manager Tan Chooi Suan

Electrical Engineer Lau Fatt Lum

Architect Q Jade Saw Architect

Quantity Surveyors Quek Jin Keat (Adviser) / Chuah Teng Teng

Structural Engineer Tan Buck Soon

Agro-forestry, Agriculture, Horticulture & Landscaping Consultant Chiu Sheng Bin

Geotechnical Engineer Dr Soo Kian Sin

Landscaping Consultant Lim Hooi Siang

Erosion Control Specialist K L Khor

Orchard & Landscaping Management Chen Sew Kian

Sadhu to all SBS supporters!

In accordance with our ethical principles of COMFIT (see footnote on page 7), we are delighted to keep you abreast of our financial standing. To date we have collected over RM1.4 million [we've yet to receive the donations raised through the Nationwide Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region)]. This would be sufficient for the development of Phase 1, but we are still about RM600,000 short of our projected target. We appeal to your generosity for the remaining funds to realise the completion of SBS. In addition, we would also require funds for the operation of SBS when the development is completed.

Breakdown of Total Donations Received (RM1,472,814) from 1.3.00 to 31.12.00

Mar	April	May	June	July
17,621	134,834	448,116	208,168	277,439
Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
131,811	85,455	74,155	39,637	55,578

Estimated Project Cost & Actual Expenditure

Items	Phase 1		Phase 2
	Budget	Expenditure as at 31.12.00	Budget
Land and related cost	360,000	359,509	—
Statutory fees	30,000	11,500	—
Infrastructures	276,000	117,500	50,000
Building cost	278,750	—	894,500
Administration and communications	54,500	21,390	22,000
Preliminaries and miscellaneous	30,000	8,710	35,000
Total	1,029,250	518,616	1,001,500

Caught in Another Cycle of Paradox

The Buddha promulgated the Vinaya [Monastic Law and Regulations] to regulate the behaviour of monks so that they could live in a harmonious and fraternal environment conducive to their spiritual development. Yet, paradoxically, throughout the history of Theravada Buddhism it has been the recurrent cause of disunity, disharmony and schism. With its emphasis on Vinaya orthodoxy, will SBS activate another cycle of paradox? Will it bring about further disunity, disharmony or discrimination in our already amorphous Malaysian Sangha?

Saccesi surveys the situation from the historical and visionary perspectives.

“

...This much are the Blessed One's training rules found and included in the *Pātimokkha* that come for recitation every fortnight. Therein all monks should train themselves in unity, empathy and harmony," concludes the monk reciting the Patimokkha, the 227 major rules for fully ordained Theravada monks. Immediately following his conclusion, the Sangha raise their palms together in *arjālī* and cheer in unison, "Very well! Very well! Very well! [That's what *sādhū* means.]" All the monks have assembled in the *sīmā* [a specially demarcated area for executing *sanghakamma* (formal or legal acts of the Sangha)] to perform the fortnightly *uposatha* ceremony by confessing their monastic offences and listening to the Patimokkha recitation.

The monks must have felt grateful to be relieved from squatting (or sitting with their legs folded sideways) for more than 40 minutes trying to pay attention to the virtually incomprehensible, brisk recitation. However, if the monks had really understood what was being recited (because everything was done in Pali), they might not have been so enthusiastic about cheering *sādhū* thrice at the end. Instead they might have expressed their doubts about the injunction of unity, empathy and harmony.

Since the Buddha's time, dogmatic adherence to Vinaya rules has produced disunity, schism and disharmony, they might have pointed out. The first major schism occurred during the Buddha's lifetime when some monks disputed a petty Vinaya rule. So intense was their partisan loyalty to their respective teachers that even the Buddha, with his great eloquence, was unable to settle their quarrel. Muttering in despair, "Divided is the Sangha! Divided is the Sangha!" he retreated alone into the forest, seeking the solace of solitude.

Unity, empathy and harmony regarding the Vinaya rules were not the birthright of all members of the Sangha. When a group of monks were lamenting the Buddha's recent

parinibbāna [final death], a dissident monk remarked, "Enough, your reverences, do not grieve, do not lament. We are well rid of this great renunciate (*mahāsamaṇa*). We were oppressed when he said, 'This is allowable to you, this is not allowable to you.' But now we will be able to do as we like and we won't do what we don't like." This irreverent remark spurred Venerable Mahakassapa to convene the First Great Council in Rajagaha where the Tipitaka was canonised.

About a hundred years after the Buddha's parinibbana, there occurred another major controversy over ten points concerning the interpretation and practice of some Vinaya rules. A minority of conscientious arahants who held the Vinaya in high esteem made a painstaking but successful attempt to "settle" the dispute. This resulted in the Second Great Council in Vesali where the Tipitaka was again canonised through the mass recitation of 700 arahants.

Their "settlement" was actually unsettling. A Great Schism was precipitated because the majority of monks who favoured changing the Vinaya rules disagreed with the conservative and orthodox decisions of the small group of arahants. Calling themselves the *Mahāsanghikas* [Followers of the Great Community], they too rallied to convene and make changes to the Tipitaka according to their own understanding and interpretation. The precedent for change was thus set, leading eventually to the myriad schools/vehicles, denominations/sects, traditions/lineages of Buddhism today, with their diverse interpretations and practices of the Dhamma-vinaya, which are still in the process of evolution.

Another great upheaval was to come about 120 years after the Second Great Council, during Emperor Asoka's reign. With his devout support for Theravada Buddhism, the Sangha became very prosperous, thereby attracting other members of non-Buddhist religious orders who were starved of public support. They gradually infiltrated into the Sangha, donning the saffron robes and

enjoying the privileged material support of the royalty and people, but retaining their own beliefs and immoral practices. Conscientious and *bona fide* bhikkhus refused to perform sanghakamma in their presence, so the fortnightly uposatha ceremony in Asokarama monastery was suspended for seven years. Eventually Asoka came to know of the situation and, with the help of the arahant Venerable Moggaliputta Tissa, effected a massive screening and purging operation. Then the Third Great Council was held at Pataliputta to reiterate the authenticity of the Tipitaka.

Among *Theravadins*, who claim to be the most orthodox and authentic bearers of the original Dhammavinaya taught by Gotama Buddha, these were some of the recurrent instances of disunity, disharmony and schism caused by strict adherence to the Vinaya.

Theravadin means "Holder of the Doctrine of the Elders." It is a name that came to be used after the seminal Second Council at Vesali, referring to those who abided by the arahants' decisions. The "Doctrine of the Elders" stemmed from the moment the Elder, Venerable Mahakassapa, successfully got his resolution "not to revoke or introduce any Vinaya rule, but to try to abide by what has already been set by the Buddha" passed unanimously by the Elders at the First Great Council in Rajagaha.

One would think that some useful lessons would have been learnt from this recurrent theme of history. Yet look at the present situation in the predominantly Theravada Buddhist countries: Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand. In Sri Lanka, Sangha members are divided into the three main *Nikāyas* [denominations] of *Syāma*, *Rāmañña* and *Amarapūra*. Some stricter elders (*theras*) of the *Rāmañña* *Nikayas* may require dubious members of other *Nikayas* to undergo a short ceremony (*dāhikamma*) to reconfirm the validity of their

original *upasampadā* [higher ordination] if they wished to reside in a *Ramañña* *Nikaya* monastery. Myanmar has more than nine different *Gaṇas* [sects] and some of the more extremist ones are just as exclusive in their attitude towards "outsiders", although modern day members of the *Shwegin* and the *Sudhamma*, the two largest *Ganas*, are now more accommodating. However, the situation in Thailand may still be coloured with sectarian chauvinism, intolerance and animosity among some partisan Sangha members of the two main *Nikayas*: *Mahānikāya* and *Dhammayuttika*. All these are manifestations of disharmony, disunity and intolerance brought about primarily by diverse interpretations and practices of the Vinaya.

So whether the Vinaya, which is supposed to be "the life of the Sasana"? Will the establishment of SBS, with its emphasis on Vinaya orthodoxy, be the cause for disharmony, disunity and discrimination among our already amorphous Malaysian Sangha? Although the project has received overwhelming support from the Buddhist community in general, murmurs of such apprehensive sentiments are not altogether absent. Members of the Sangha who are not so particular about Vinaya discipline feel uneasy and threatened by the good press given to the importance of the Vinaya in sustaining the life of the Sasana. It will not be the least surprising for them to harbour anxious thoughts such as: "Now that the laity knows more about the Vinaya, we will be exposed. Will that jeopardise their devotion and material support for us? Will SBS produce a new breed of elite monks who will criticise and discriminate against us for our laxity in the Vinaya?"

Throughout the history of Theravada Buddhism, there have been ups and downs, rises and falls. The recurrent sine curve seems to be the natural trend of all events brought about by the interaction of conditioned phenomena. Tradition tells us that when the Buddha first started his ministry, he did not lay down any formal rules because his early disciples had high standards of

moral integrity and lofty spiritual aspirations. As his followers grew in number, quantity gradually surpassed quality. This can be gauged by the following conversation between Venerable Bhaddali and the Buddha:

Why is it, Bhante, that there used to be fewer training rules and more bhikkhus established in the knowledge of Awakening [Arahantship]? And why is it that there are now more training rules and fewer bhikkhus established in the knowledge of Awakening?

So it is, Bhaddali. When beings have begun to degenerate, and the true Dhamma has begun to disappear, there are more training rules and fewer bhikkhus established in the knowledge of Awakening...

BHADDALI SUTTA, *Majjhima Nikaya*

Sometimes, when things swing to an extreme, nature intervenes to create its own balance. The above instances of apparent disunity, disharmony and schism did not simply happen. Most were the turning phases of the sine curve, the aftermath of attempts to revive, rejuvenate, or revitalise the Sasana after a lapse of decline in morals, learning or meditative wisdom. Often the instigators of radical change may have meant well, but their eager followers, blinded by their very enthusiasm and devotion, may have misconstrued their efforts and message and carried their fanaticism too far.

In a conversation with Venerable Mahakassapa, which began as quoted above, the Buddha concluded that it was not external factors like the earth element, etc. that will cause the Sasana to disappear but foolish Buddhists themselves:

...There are five regressive things that will conduce to the confusion and

disappearance of the Saddhamma [True Dhamma = Sasana]. What five? Herein, Kassapa, bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, or lay Buddhists dwell disrespectful and disobedient toward the Teacher, Dhamma, Sangha, course of training and meditative concentration...

SADDHAMMAPPATIRUPAKA SUTTA,
Samyutta Nikaya

The Vinaya was promulgated by the Buddha to regulate the conduct of the monks so that as members of a community, they could live in harmony and fraternity, in an environment conducive to spiritual progress. Yet throughout the history of Buddhism, it has been the recurrent cause of disunity, disharmony and schism. This may seem to be a paradox, but Vinaya lovers will be quick to point out that it only appears to be so because "shameless" monks do not abide by the injunction: "*Therein all monks should train themselves in unity, empathy and harmony.*"

The Buddha called monks who deliberately disobey Vinaya rules "shameless" because they lack the conscience to abide by the common code of conduct that is supposed to be the foundation for making the Sangha worthy of gifts, hospitality, offerings, and reverence.

Nevertheless, history has shown us that there are cycles of such an apparent paradox, which can be represented by the recurrent sine curve. Since the vision of SBS is a noble attempt to "protect the Sasana from decline in morals, learning and meditative wisdom", it can be regarded as a form of revivalism, a turning point along the sine curve. In other words, we are at the threshold of a critical stage of development of Theravada Buddhism in our country. The founders and

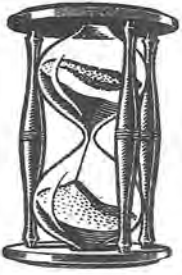
supporters of SBS should therefore be well aware of the lessons of history and be particularly sensitive to the apprehensive murmuring within our Buddhist community, especially the uneasy sentiments of our local Sangha members. Positive and effective steps should be innovated and implemented to allay their fears and to ensure that history does not repeat itself negatively, or at least to minimise the possible repercussions.

So it looks like the future we can help to shape now does not merely comprise creating public awareness of the need for suitably trained local monks and fundraising to set up and operate a monks training centre. It goes deeper into the heart where we have to seriously consider the wider implications of being caught in another imminent cycle of paradox, and to develop compassionate insight and visionary foresight to create a better Buddhist environment for our descendants and ourselves. ❖

**We appeal
to our caring
readers for your
visionary wisdom.
Let us pool our creative
resources together to create
a peaceful and harmonious
renaissance conducive to our
spiritual growth.
Please send your innovative
ideas and suggestions to**

The Hon. Secretary
Taiping Insight Meditation Society
c/o 9 Lorong 5
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34000 Taiping
Perak

<agganani@tm.net.my>



UNFOLDMENT

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.

- 28 July SBS road shows in Jitra Buddhist Society at 9 pm,
29 Kangar Buddhist Society at 9.30 pm and
30 Bukit Mertajam Buddhist Meditation Centre at 1 pm.

3 Aug TIMS Patron YB Ho Cheng Wan meets with Ven Aggacitta and TIMS Committee members to discuss extent of press coverage for the Nationwide Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) in aid of SBS. He confirms that Perak State Executive Councillor, YB Datuk Ong Kah Chuan, has agreed to be Patron of TIMS as well.

4 Aug SBS agricultural consultant Chiu Sheng Bin and a friend arrive from Penang and proceed up to SBS land to number (label) the 280-odd durian trees there as well as to plant some grass at critical slopes to arrest erosion.

Volunteer producer-cum-director Tan Joo Lan visits Taiping with her crew to shoot Buddhist activities for a multi-media production to promote SBS.



5 Aug Tan Joo Lan continues her shooting at TIMS in the morning until early afternoon.

Architects Kim and Jade Saw; geotechnical engineer Dr K S Soo; SBS building development manager Ooi Eng Huat; Ven Aggacitta and other TIMS members visit SBS in the afternoon to make on-site decisions regarding the location of kutis, water sima and other buildings. The video crew also follows to take action shots, building sites and SBS landscape. They then leave for Penang to continue their shooting.

After 2 days of hard work tackling the "Mt Kinabalu-like" slopes of SBS, S B Chiu and friend return to Penang.

6 Aug The video crew starts shooting the crowded alms gathering in MBMC premises early in the morning.

Official Launching of the Nationwide Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) in aid of SBS by its Chief Patron, Penang



State Executive Councillor, YB Dato' Koay Kar Huah, at MBMC, Penang. More than 500 people attend the ceremony, which starts after 10.00 am. After covering this event the video crew goes around to shoot other relevant Buddhist sites in Penang.

14 Aug SBS B&D Team meet at Satyaloka Centre, KL, to discuss building plans and project scheduling.

19 Aug Sis Joo Lan and her video crew visit TIMS again to shoot dana in progress and interviews with Ven Suvanno, and Ven (Prof) Dhammavihari from Sri Lanka.

20 Aug After lunch dana to commemorate the official opening of *All Seasons Restaurant*, Ipoh, members of NCD(C) discuss stage management with Sis Ong Su-ming, who will produce a musical sketch for the Nationwide Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) to be held in PISA, Penang, on 2 December, 2000.

21 Aug Steven and Linda Proctor, former managers of Blue Mountains Meditation Centre, Australia, and other visitors from Penang and Alor Setar visit Khemarama and SBS site. A full-time live-in caretaker, Ong Chin Lye, moves into the empty brick cottage at SBS site to try out a new life-style.

23 Aug SBS geo-technical consultant, Dr K S Soo, and his assistant, Ooi, visit SBS site with Ven Aggacitta and TIMS President, Goh Keat Soon to confirm site for proposed weir and water sima, make recommendations to improve road construction and select sites for Phase 1 kutis. They take a refreshing dip in the nearby waterfall before calling it a day.

2 Sept Some members of SBS B&D Team and others visit SBS to relocate sites for proposed sick ward, publication room, office, reception, workshop, guest lodges, Dhamma-workers' quarters, classrooms, etc. according to the demands of the terrain. They include Ven Aggacitta, Architect Jade Saw, building development manager Ooi Eng Huat, and visiting civil engineer Ooi and his wife (Dr Soo's sister). The team decides



not to demolish the existing buildings but to renovate them to suit functional and site requirements. Architect Jade Saw also gives her recommendations concerning the Feng Sui of the layout plan.

3 Sept About 30 members of the Bukit Mertajam Buddhist Meditation Centre visit Ven Aggacitta at Khemarama and later SBS site as well.

5 Sept Ven Aggacitta and members of TIMS leave Taiping for the East Coast in a 12-seater van on a 5-day Dhamma tour to promote SBS. Ven Aggacitta begins the campaign by giving a Dhamma Talk entitled "In Transit or Rebirth? (Part 1)" from 8.30 pm to 10.30 pm at Metta Arama, Kota Bahru.

6 Sept Ven Aggacitta continues his Dhamma Talk "In Transit or Rebirth? (Part 2)" at 8.45 pm in Metta Arama, Kota Bahru.

7 Sept Another vanload of TIMS members and their family joins the first group in Bodhi Vihara, off Kuala Terengganu, where lunch dana for Venerables Aggacitta and Dhammajivo is held. Ven Aggacitta delivers a Dhamma Talk in Hokkien entitled



"Spiritual Self-defense" at 3 pm in Bodhi Vihara. Later in the evening, at 9 pm, SBS road show team gives a presentation in Hokkien at the Terengganu Buddhist Association, Kuala Terengganu.

8 Sept Buddhists in Metta Arama, Kota Bahru, listen to Ven Aggacitta talk on "Spiritual Self-defense" in English at 2.45 pm, and attend a slide presentation by the SBS road show team in the evening at 8.30 pm.

9 Sept Buddhist undergraduates of the School of Medical Sciences, USM, listen attentively to a Dhamma Talk entitled "In Search of Truth" by Ven Aggacitta. The talk, which is held in one of the lecture halls in the Kubang Kerian campus, concludes with slide presentations of the SBS project and an invitation by Ven



Aggacitta for potential monks. The Buddhist society's Religious Adviser, Dr Myint Tun, also attends the talk.

10 Sept TIMS contingent relaxes at Pantai Cahaya Bulan (formerly Beach of Passionate Love) after morning pindapata at Metta Arama, Kota Bahru, then leaves for home at about 1 pm.

15-30 Sept TIMS members and friends work intensively to produce the first SBS newsletter in Chinese – amateur editors, proof-readers and layout artists endeavouring to bring out something close to professional standards.

24 Sept A convoy of 10 cars brings Buddhist devotees from Penang to TIMS where they listen to a short Dhamma Talk and offer lunch dana to Ven Aggacitta. Later, some of them also visit SBS site. Elderly aunties and uncles brave the steep climb uphill. Although the concrete road along the steeper slopes has already been completed, the hike can still be rather taxing for city folk.

30 Sept A 1:50 scale model of a typical kuti at SBS arrives in Taiping from KL, including slides of it from various angles, taken by Architect Jade Saw. At 8.30 pm Ven Aggacitta gives a Dhamma Talk entitled "United We Stand", followed by a slide



presentation showing the latest developments of the SBS project in Mahindarama Buddhist Temple, Penang. Both talks are in Hokkien.

4 Oct Bhante Aggacitta takes his former classmate, Michael Woo and his friends up to the SBS site to seek his expertise as a chemical engineer on the feasibility of setting up a filtration system for SBS water supply. They decide that the filtration system will start with sedimentation tanks located near the source of a spring flowing through the forest behind SBS

land. A proposal to build a 10,000-gallon collection tank to store the filtered water on the highest point of the Sanctuary is under consideration. This main storage tank will distribute water to 3 other smaller storage tanks located at different zones. Michael will draw up the plans for this project.

- 7 Oct Quek Jin Keat requests to downgrade his role as volunteer quantity surveyor in the Building and Development team because of crucial business commitments.
- 10 Oct Chuah Teng Teng, the niece of a TIMS member, Ooi Cheng Suan, volunteers her expertise as QS to stand in for Quek Jin Keat.
- 12 Oct TIM's secretary, Lim Lay Hoon, interviews SBS building development manager, Ooi Eng Huat, on the progress of SBS development.
- 14 Oct While at Bodhirama Estate, KKB, to attend SBVM's 2nd Kathina ceremony Ven. Aggacitta takes the opportunity to discuss plans for the proposed SBS water sima with Sayadaw U Kovidabhivamsa, a very learned and distinguished mahathera from Masoyein Monastery, Mandalay, one of the most famous Pali study centres in Myanmar. After several hours of discussion, the Venerable Sayadaw strongly recommends that a formally demarcated sima is preferable to a natural water sima because the validity of the latter is questionable if it were built on the proposed site. However he also encourages further discussion with other experts on Buddhist monastic law.
- 18 Oct SBS project facilitator, Goh Keat Soon, drives Ven. Aggacitta to Than Hsian Temple, Penang, where he discusses the



legalities of making a water sima in SBS with Ven. Dhammavihari, the Sri Lankan professor in charge of Pali and Buddhist Studies, International Buddhist University College (Penang campus).

Later in the evening, Ven. Aggacitta meets with SBS pro tem committee members Goh Keat Soon, Ng Kian Chong and Ooi Eng Huat at TIMS. They decide to go through the tedious formality of removing possible former simas and declaring a new one at SBS after the kutis have been built.

- 21 Oct Chiu Sheng Bin, our consultant agronomist, visits SBS. He introduces a new method of caring for the durian fruits (yes – the durian trees are fruiting!) by showing members of TIMS how to wrap up each unripe fruit with a bag made of newspaper. SBS lives up its promise of organic methods of orchard management. Accompanied by members of TIMS he wraps 20 fruits as samples. After interviewing prospective



candidates for the job of looking after our orchard, he recommends Saw Kheng Hong, a young innovative farmer who owns a 10-acre durian orchard nearby.

Venerable Uttara (19 vassas) and 2 other Thai monks visit SBS. Venerable Uttara agrees to Ven. Aggacitta's request to help out in the making of a new sima in SBS.

- 27 Oct SBS is honoured by the visit of Ashin Nyanissara, a Sayadaw who is passing through Malaysia. His visit coincides with our SBS groundbreaking ceremony held at 1.30 pm on the site earmarked for the sima pavilion. This day has been specially chosen as a most auspicious day for a most auspicious event. SBS is now ready for construction to begin.
- 29 Oct Ven Aggacitta's former coursemate, Tan Chooi Suan, volunteers her professional expertise as project manager for SBS B&D Team, thus filling a long-vacant post.
- 1 Nov SBS road show at 8.30 pm, Metta Lodge, Johor Bharu. Although the centre is still under renovation, the hall upstairs is over-packed with more than 70 people who listen intently to the presentation.
- 2 Nov About 50 people attend the SBS Road show at 8.30 pm, Santisukharama, Kota Tinggi. The audience includes resident meditation teacher, Sayadaw U Nandasiddhi and visiting Vietnamese bhikkhu, Venerable Nagasena.
- 3 Nov Venerable Aggacitta visits Venerable Vajiradhamma at Bhaddekaratta Hermitage, Batu Pahat, to invite the latter and other resident Malaysian bhikkhus to assist in the making of a new formally demarcated sima at SBS in the near future. Venerable Vajiradhamma promises to render any possible assistance for the sake of the Sasana in Malaysia.
- 6 Nov The blasting of boulders obstructing the construction of the approach road to SBS begins today, thus continuing the building works that has been temporarily suspended.
- 7 Nov SBS gives a contribution of RM11,500 to TNB for bringing electrical supply to the site.
- 9-10 Nov Three Sri Lankan monks from the Yogashrama Sangstava lineage, Venerables Mahasamkicca (35 vassas), Vimalanyana (7 vassas) and Nyanasila (6 vassas), visit TIMS and SBS.



Venerable Aggacitta discusses with them the feasibility of making a water sima at SBS and the problem of defining a *gamasima* (village boundary) in our Malaysian context.



- 16 Nov Visitors from Sarawak, Wung Wei Kee and his brother, William, together with PJ friends visit TIMS, Khemarama and SBS. They are impressed by the ideal location of the site.
- 17 Nov Tan Guan Soon from Kuching and Thomas Ng from KL arrive in Taiping, intending to render their services to SBS development.
- 18 Nov Some members of SBS B&D team make a site visit to SBS. They are geotechnical consultant, Dr Soo Kian Sin; project manager, Tan Chooi Suan; water supply and treatment consultant, Michael Woo; and quantity surveyor, Chuah Teng Teng. The proposed sites for constructing retention ponds and the water sima are the subject of their survey.
- TIMS Secretary, Lim Lay Hoon, receives a letter from the Register of Societies approving the amendments made to the TIMS Constitution. The amendments were made to accommodate the formation of a special sub-committee for establishing and managing SBS.
- 19 Nov Dr K S Soo visits SBS again with K L Khor, an erosion control specialist, who volunteers to assist in arresting and preventing erosion of the steep slopes of SBS.

- 28-30 Nov Bhante Gunaratana of Bhavana Centre, USA, visit TIMS, SBS and Khemarama while he conducts a one-day-plus metta retreat for members of TIMS. Shortly after his arrival from Penang, Bhante has a preview of the SBS videotape to be played on 2 December during the Nationwide Charity Dinner & Show (Northern Region) in PISA. He discusses the policy and system of management in Bhavana Centre with Venerable Aggacitta. He advises him to make it mandatory for postulants in SBS to undergo a 2-year probation period (observing 8 or 10 precepts for a year followed by a year of samanera life) before giving them higher ordination as



bhikkhus. He also stresses the importance of properly screening monks who have been ordained elsewhere prior to accepting them in SBS.

- 2 Dec More than 2,500 diners and spectators attend the SBS Nationwide Charity Dinner and Show (Northern Region) at PISA, Penang.
- 3 Dec The Bukit Mertajam Mahasanghikadana Working Committee presents a cheque of RM52,000 to the Malaysian Sangha Fund and cheques of RM4,000 each to 12 Buddhist Temples and Organisations, including SBS. TIMS President, Goh Keat Soon, and SBS Spiritual Director, Ven Aggacitta, attend the ceremony held at Seberang Prai Tengah Buddhist Association, BM.
- 4 Dec Michael Woo arrives in SBS to supervise and work on the retention ponds at the water supply source for SBS. He brings along his three teenaged sons to assist in the work. Members of TIMS and SBS supporters, including Tan Guan Soon from Kuching who is still staying there, join in the *gotong royong*. It is a backbreaking task digging three ponds in the rocky terrain as they manually heave big rocks



and boulders up and down slopes. SBS shows its appreciation by supplying durians daily to the 'labourers'. TIMS does its part by using womenpower to supply meals twice a day, delivered by hiking up and down SBS.

- 5 Dec Contractor Ewe Hong Lean of Sunset Villa Sdn Bhd, visit SBS to survey proposed building sites for 1st Phase development.
- Chiu Sheng Bin, consultant agronomist for SBS, comes for a one-day visit to check on the progress in the orchard. He brings with him a legume creeper to be used as a cover crop which will provide nitrogen to the soil. The organic way of orchard management seems to be bearing fruit, as the durians which are wrapped are much healthier than unwrapped ones.
- 7 Dec Dr Soo Kian Sin, consultant geotechnical engineer for SBS, arrives on call to resolve a disagreement over the choice of site and construction materials for the proposed sedimentation tank. His expert decision entails more muscle work as the able-bodied shifted huge rocks in order to create the platform for a reinforced concrete sedimentation tank.
- 8 Dec Michael Woo and his sons leave for home after 5 days of fruitful work in SBS. The work continues under the supervision of Tan Guan Soon.

9 Dec A group of friends who are former classmates or course mates of Ven Aggacitta visits SBS. One of them, Lim Hooi Siang, surveys the retention ponds area and the sites of other proposed buildings to work on a comprehensive landscape proposal for the 1st phase of SBS development.



11 Dec Lau Fatt Lum, consultant electrical engineer for SBS, comes to mark the spots where streetlights will be put up along the approach road to SBS.



TNB contractor and his workers start planting 52 spun poles along the main approach road. These will be used to support electrical cables bringing electricity to SBS.

12 Dec Ven Aggacitta discusses the legalities of making a water sima with Sayadaw U Silananda and Mr Lee Kok Kiat (former



Surveyor General of Perak State) at Buddha Dhamma Mandala Society, Singapore.

14 Dec TIMS President, Goh Keat Soon, and Ven Aggacitta visit Sayadaw U Nandiya at Samnak Sambodhi, Kepong, to meet prospective caretaker for SBS.

17 Dec During an SBS Pro Tem Committee meeting at Buddhist Wisdom Centre, PJ, Hor Kwei Loon gives an impressive presentation on his proposal to streamline SBS management structure. The Committee decides to adopt his proposal after

the details have been worked out prior to dissolving the Pro Tem Committee, now that TIMS amended constitution has been approved by the Registrar of Societies.

18 Dec New caretaker for SBS, arrives to take up residence.

20 Dec Ven Aggacitta recruits Mrs AK Wong of Bandar Utama Buddhist Society, PJ, to work on a scale model of a mini stupa to be constructed on the roof of the sima hall in SBS. The stupa is to reflect a unique Malaysian identity.

21 Dec The first stage of work on the retention ponds and the sedimentation tank is finished and Tan Guan Soon leaves for home.

27-28 Dec TIMS's youth camp conducts some of its activities on SBS. These include meditation sessions under the guidance



of Ven Aggacitta as well as outdoor dhamma dynamics. These continue for another day on the 28th.

28 Dec Sirirat Lim, editor-in-chief of the SBS Chinese newsletter, and friends visit SBS. They also meet with some members of her editorial team from TIMS at its centre.

Michael Woo returns with his sons to start the next stage of work on the collection tanks in SBS.

29 Dec Dr Soo Kian Sin, consultant geotechnical engineer for SBS, brings his friend, K L Khor, to seek his expertise on the treatment of erosion prone slopes. Khor sponsors erosion control mats, adhesive, seedlings and other materials. While Dr Soo supervises the ongoing earthwork for the dam and water sima, Khor gives a practical demonstration on how to plant erosion control seedlings on steep exposed slopes. Michael Woo and sons, together with members and friends of TIMS, participate in throwing specially sticky mud balls of seedlings onto a steep slope near the entrance proper to SBS.

30 Dec Michael and his sons leave for PJ after their labour of love in SBS. Under his supervision, strong volunteers clear massive rocks to create a platform for the construction of a water collection tank(s).

31 Dec Hor Kwei Loon gives detailed feedback on the revised Objects and By-laws of Sasanarakkha Buddhist Sanctuary Management Committee to Ven Aggacitta and members of TIMS General Committee. In the discussion which continues to the next day, he also proposes a tentative line-up for the streamlined Management Committee, comprising only 5 executive members. ❖

Eventful Day Bodes Well for SBS

By Lim Lay Hoon

To the casual eye, Taiping appears to be a typical Malaysian small town. Few except the avid historian would remember its glorious past that faded with the march of time. This town of everlasting peace holds the distinction of notching several 'firsts' in the country – the first railway line, first museum, first hill resort, first English school for girls... the list runs long.

Enter the new millennium and the pulse of its history is stirred and once again felt. The flame of its past glory is rekindled.

When a patron of TIMS/SBS, YB Ho Cheng Wang, landed the *cangkul* (or hoe) on SBS ground at 1.50 pm on Friday, 27 October 2000, a veritable treasure trove was uncovered. SBS, the first Malaysian Theravada monks training centre, joined the ranks of the nation's 'firsts' and the trail was blazed for the development of a Malaysian Theravada Buddhist identity in this new era.

Eight members of the Sangha and about 50 people – old, young, big, small, from near and far, had gathered at SBS on this very auspicious occasion chosen according to the '*Feng Shui*' tradition. It was a blistering hot afternoon but driven by the enthusiasm to be a part of this historical epic, we braved the heat and step by step, we climbed the steep slopes of SBS along the newly concretised road. Members of the Sangha and a few lucky ones had the service of three 4WDs to ferry them up.

The day before, some members of TIMS had gone up to cut the grass at the site earmarked for the *sima* hall. Our building development manager had gone up two days earlier to put in place a piece of tarpaulin above the site of the *sima* hall by tying all four corners of the tarpaulin to surrounding durian trees. This was to serve as a shed under which the monks would sit to perform the recitation of *parittas* and blessings as part of the ground-breaking ceremony.

The morning of this auspicious day saw members of TIMS busy at the centre premises preparing *pindapāta* [alms food] for eight monks, namely, Venerables Sitagu



NOT JUST CANGKUL ANGIN... YB Ho breaks the ground at the spot where the boulders will eventually be blasted.

Sayadaw (Ashin Nyanissara), Aggacitta, Katapunnya, Radha, Dassana and Jinadatta, and two samaneras from Vivekavana, Bukit Berapit.

According to the original programme, pindapata was to be held up at SBS. However, for logistic reasons, the venue was changed to the centre. After the monks' meal, there was a short Dhamma talk, given by Ashin Nyanissara, who was on a visit to Malaysia. It was a lucky coincidence that he arrived in Taiping on the day of our ground-breaking ceremony. Sayadaw plans to set up an international Buddhist university in Myanmar. He has already established a number of monasteries and one fully equipped modern hospital in Sagaing Hills, Myanmar. He is also the founder of Sitagu Buddhist Vihara and the Theravada Dhamma Society of America in Austin, Texas, USA. A popular Dhamma speaker who gives lectures and talks throughout the world, he has also been invited to attend the Peace Conference in the United Nations.

It was 1.15 pm when everybody reached the site of the ground-breaking ceremony. Last minute adjustments to the tarpaulin shed had to be made by propping it up higher to keep off the intense afternoon heat. Mats were placed over the rocky and uneven ground under the tarpaulin. There, next to a rippling brook, the monks took their places, facing the eastern direction.

YB Ho Cheng Wang arrived at 1.30 pm. Soon after that, the monks started reciting the *parittas* [verses of protection] and blessings, led by the architect of SBS, Ven

Aggacitta. Meantime, at the caretaker's kuti (where the office of SBS will eventually be built), Ashin Nyanissara was also chanting as the climb down to the brook and up again was too arduous for him. The end of the chanting was the cue for the actual ground-breaking. With three swings of the *cangkul*, YB Ho broke the ground where the *sima* pavilion would be built. SBS was now ready for the construction to begin.

A devotee set free 100 birds to mark the end of this simple yet meaningful event. Then a light feathery shower descended from the heavens above as if the *devas* too rejoiced and bestowed their blessings upon SBS. Even the durian trees seemed to express their joy by waving their branches and fluttering their leaves as a gust of wind blew over the site in a final crescendo.

After the monks and other guests had left, members of TIMS, under the supervision of our consultant geotechnologist, Dr Soo Kian Sin, took part in a *gotong-royong*. Happily we planted the *Arachis pintoi*, a cover crop, to prevent erosion on exposed terrain along a cleared road leading to the source of the piped spring water of SBS. So engrossed were we at work that we did not notice the changing grey sky. Suddenly, we were caught in a rapid lashing storm that ended on a pleasant note, with the proverbial sun coming out after the rain.

As we walked down at the end of the day, a rainbow arched perfectly across the sky. With one end anchored on the SBS hill, it rendered a fairy tale ending to an eventful day that bodes well for the future of SBS. ❖