

BODHI TIMES

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight

Founding Patron: His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama

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Our goal is to improve health, education and the environment in developing countries by providing a hook, not a fish. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principle of skillful, compassionate action and is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We encourage your ideas and acts of kindness. Realising the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. Now more than ever, if we don't work together to reduce the world's much-discussed problems, then who will?

Free Mobile Medical Clinics in Bangladesh

Free mobile medical clinics are a vital factor in improving the health of isolated villagers in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Ven Praggha Lankar Bhikku of Parbatya Bouddha Mission (PBM) told Colin and Susan in Sydney in June.

From April-June 2006, BODHI supported mobile health clinics in the CHT. Medical staff (1 each doctor, paramedic and nurse and 5 local volunteers) provided primary health care and treatment to 509 patients suffering from such diseases as malaria, acute respiratory infection, diarrhoea, dysentery, asthma, skin disease, peptic ulcer diseases and rheumatism. PBM transported patients requiring admission by ambulance to the closest hospital.

PBM's report (available on our website) notes that people in the areas visited by the mobile medical clinic lack general knowledge about healthcare and awareness of communicable diseases. It quantifies success by a 'gradual reduction in the number of patients in and around the areas' that the mobile clinic visits, and plans to shift the clinic to other areas. While investigating health education, BODHI is providing A\$5,000/US\$4,430 for more free mobile medical clinics.



Ambulance at flooded PBM Medical Centre; inset: workers at PBM office
Courtesy PBM

BODHI Human Rights Committee formed

BODHI has formed a Human Rights Committee with Emilia Della Torre, Kabita Chakma (*right*) and Susan Woldenberg Butler. Its first project is to prepare a portfolio on the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), Bangladesh for the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), in Geneva. We are hopeful about a possible ICJ mission to Bangladesh next year and are working on the final draft of the submission as this goes to press.



Please contact BODHI if you're interested in participating in this aspect of our work.

Guillebaud's new African NGO TASK for women's health

Prof. John Guillebaud writes: 'I'm recently back from a productive trip to Cape Town to launch our new medical education charity. TASK (Towards African Solutions through Knowledge) for women's health is a charity registered in the United Kingdom to improve the health of women in Africa. To achieve this goal we aim to research and promote the use of modern communication technology for the purposes of education and to provide practical support to workers in the field whose training and experience may be limited. The spread of the mobile phone networks in the African continent offers a unique opportunity to improve communication and education for the prevention, early detection and effective treatment of the major causes of morbidity and mortality for women.

'TASK looks for affordable and sustainable ways to improve women's health in Africa, using locally generated ideas which must not conflict with established culture. The western model for healthcare is not currently affordable for all the population of the African continent. It is intended to look for other models, including the use of non-medically qualified personnel for delivering health care who have been given appropriate training. To aid with the supervision of these specially trained personnel, consideration will be given to the use of modern information and communication technology.'

BODHI hopes to support TASK's work.

Sri Lanka Udana School

BODHI received a donation of A\$400/US\$357 for the education of an autistic child. This was donated to the Udana School for Special Needs Children. Details are being finalised as this goes to press.



Students at the Udana School celebrate the Sri Lankan New Year in April

Tibet

Revolving Sheep Bank

As mentioned in the last newsletter, BODHI has expanded into a third nomad area adjacent to the first two in Tibet's Phala region to begin **Phase 3** of the Revolving Sheep Bank. Prof. Melvyn C Goldstein went to Tibet earlier this year to hand over funds. We hope to have a report and photograph in time for the next newsletter.

Startled awake: the nature of engagement

Anyone who is a Vietnamese ... when it's sunset, approaching a temple in a daze, upon hearing the compassionate sound of the temple bell, cannot fail to be startled awake from mundane dreams, Nguyễn Mực Tiên, 1927, DeVido, E., In: Modernity and Re-enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam

Readers of this newsletter know that BODHI attempts to engage constructively with the real problems of the world. In particular we try to reduce the physical and mental suffering of poverty, whether manifest through disease, despair, vulnerability or oppression. I recently attended the ninth biennial meeting of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists, held in Taiwan for the first time. We then toured this crowded island, visiting two beautiful and wealthy Buddhist temples, each with a worldwide network of daughter institutions. Temple spokespersons claimed that their evangelical work was socially engaged. However, even through interpreters, I sensed a large gulf between my conception of social engagement and theirs.

The scope and outreach of these temples are tremendously successful. Both are very large, immaculately kept and surrounded by beautiful gardens. Thousands of Buddha images adorned vast halls. People were calm, friendly and seemed happy — traits which mirrored this prosperous and comparatively egalitarian society as a whole. I saw no beggars in Taiwan, perhaps due to the penetration of Buddhism into ordinary everyday life.

Yet, nowhere in these palaces of faith did I sense any recognition of the world's material and environmental crises. In one monastery, thousands of dollars had been spent to ensure the survival of individual trees in recognition of the importance of nature; yet there seemed no parallel awareness of the need to conserve energy or reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Perhaps this simply reflects a general lack of understanding within Taiwan of climate change — even though that country seems to be experiencing more typhoons which very likely are climate change related.

More importantly, I detected no hint in these monasteries of awareness of the extent of global poverty and exploitation. Their Buddhism seemed to emphasise faith, prayer and material generosity, the last more to construct and operate religious centres than to help the poor. My limited knowledge of these daughter centres is that devotees are encouraged to continue these activities. Status primarily comes from one's material ability to foster even more centres. The model is very successful. Doubtless these beliefs give many devotees satisfaction and some mental peace, but does this method help to reduce global poverty and exploitation? Could it worsen these conditions, including by discouraging analysis?

Evangelism & social engagement

The psychologist Abraham Maslow described a hierarchy of needs, from basic survival to self-actualisation. I think at its core this hierarchy is self-evident. We should be sceptical of those who argue that enlightenment is attainable by the extremely poor, especially if such claims are made by the well off. While there may be a few saints who thrive in material poverty, these people are very rare. They have usually consciously chosen their poverty, as did the Buddha following his life as a privileged prince. Such freedom to choose reflects a very different experience from that of those born into poverty with little prospect of escape.

Preaching to the wealthy has a place. I do not deny the dissatisfaction of many people who lead materially acquisitive lives. Everyone benefits from greater spiritual awareness, including that attainable from sanctuaries such as the ones I visited. But I think there is a hierarchy of suffering. Material poverty, disease and exploitation are common, especially in developing countries. Some Buddhist scholars argue that all Buddhism is inherently 'engaged.' Though this has many contested meanings (which I lack space to properly discuss) the scale of human exploitation, rather than the inherent suffering from disease, ageing and so on, indicates to me that much more could and should be done. More good would be done if religions worked harder to reduce physical suffering, poverty and vulnerability than to preach to the wealthy.

Many missionaries, Christian as well as Buddhist, appear to believe that spiritual evangelism is of equal or greater value than the provision of material aid or the promotion of health and security. This belief system seems to have two central propositions. First, good mental well-being in this life can be attained by following various spiritual practices, such as the Buddhist Eightfold Path. The second core proposition is that life after death is more important than life on Earth.

For most religions, a better future life includes improved material circumstances. (Descriptions of heaven never include poverty.) It follows that spiritual development in this life can have a material payoff in the next, even if there is little material improvement in this life. Actually, I argue, the quest to provide essentials such as adequate food, shelter and a legal framework which protects basic rights — for example, protection from displacement without compensation, receiving an education or seeking justice if attacked — is more important than the next life.

It seems very hard for any individual to make much of a difference. Few can be charismatic human rights lawyers or dedicated health or

aid workers. But could not spiritual leaders — including Buddhists — draw more attention to the scale of exploitation? Fear of being criticised as 'political' often precludes this. However, ignoring these issues is itself political. If more spiritual figures spoke out about global injustice, then this would surely change government and business policies in ways which would be of lasting benefit. Similarly spiritual outreach, if mainly concerned with conversion, is not only unlikely to be socially engaged but also may be harmful, for example by promotion division or by suppressing social analysis. However the forthcoming high-level Buddhist meeting in Hanoi (p 3) suggests that change is possible.

If we can reduce population growth, increase education and find leaders who speak out for greater human rights, then our world has a chance. Not for utopia, but for sustainable survival. Spiritual leaders who encourage their followers to ponder these issues — as well as to say prayers, follow precepts and pursue a right livelihood — might not be able to erect as grand buildings but, I believe, will contribute to a more just and enduring civilisation.

The example of Burma

In September monks led a huge protest in Burma (Myanmar), which the military government cruelly suppressed. Many governments, including some in Asia protested — although not the Chinese, who gain considerable material benefit from their support of the Burmese government. The Japanese government announced it would revise its aid policy following the killing of a Japanese journalist.

The critical reaction of the UN and many foreign governments is encouraging. Yet Aung Sun Su Kyi, the elected leader of the Burmese people, has been held under house arrest for more than a decade. The exploitation, poverty and semi-slavery of the Burmese people are well documented. Why then has this strong international criticism, which includes sanctions, been so recent?



A Pure Land painting, monastery, Taiwan

Vietnam: democracy, healing & climate change

BODHI director Dr. Colin Butler has been appointed to the International Organising Committee (IOC) for the sixth United Nations endorsed international Buddhist meeting and conference to celebrate Vesak (the thrice sacred day of the Buddhist calendar), to be held in Hanoi, Vietnam from May 14-16th, 2008. Almost 1,000 Buddhist leaders and scholars from all traditions will be invited; many others are expected to attend. This is an excellent opportunity to experience the hospitality of the Vietnamese people, and at the same time contribute to Vietnam becoming an even more open and prosperous society. The theme of the meeting will be a 'Buddhist Contribution to Building a Just, Democratic and Civil Society.' Major sub-themes include: (1) War, Conflict and Healing, and (2) Climate change and environmental care. Colin will co-organise and chair the workshop on climate change.

Confirmed speakers include the leading Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hahn and Professor Amartya Sen, the 1998 Nobel Laureate in Economics. We are extremely heartened by this agenda, which seems to us to be very much in the spirit of engaged Buddhism.



Left: Chakma traditional dance; rt: students at assembly
Courtesy SNEHA



SNEHA

Mr. Susanta Chakma writes from Delhi, 'We thank BODHI for supporting SNEHA-2nd year of the project titled 'Confidence and Capacity building of the underprivileged children through education in Arunachal Pradesh.'

In addition to new teachers, music classes were introduced formally this year and a music teacher was also appointed.

BODHI is contributing A\$5,000/US\$4,430 towards teachers' salaries, with another A\$100/US\$89 donated by Mr Kulottam Chakma for office and computer expenses. See our website for SNEHA's report.

BODHI as umbrella

BODHI continues to seek to help smaller organisations with a similar philosophy to us. We can sometimes channel donations for legitimate development projects for organisations which are not yet tax deductible. So far we have worked with the Udana School and the Bodh Gaya Development Fund. We continue to negotiate an agreement with Zadoh, (www.gadenrelief.org) a Canadian NGO established by Zazep Tuku Rinpoche, which has supporters in Australia and the US. Zadoh works in Tibet.

Holiday gifts

Susan's cookbooks make great gifts: *Heritage Highway Cookery*, *Favourite Recipes From Along Tasmania's Midlands Highway (Mostly)* at the cost of \$20 + \$5 postage and handling and *Midlands Morsels*, *Favourite Recipes from the Heart of Tasmania (Mostly)* @ \$15 + \$5 postage and handling. Susan donates the profits of cookbooks sold through the newsletter and website to BODHI. Please contact BODHI to purchase these unique gifts.

*Special offer: both cookbooks for \$30 + \$5 postage and handling
(please apply for international postage rates)*

Thank you

Garry Corr, ACT, Australia
Prof. John Hamilton, NSW, Australia
Jane Hudspeth, Tasmania, Australia
Dr. David King, Queensland, Australia
Dr. Marty Rubin, California, USA
Rev. Alan Senauke, California, USA
Scott Trimmingham, California, USA
Most Ven Prof Dr Lê Manh Thát, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
Bryan and Amy West, Queensland, Australia

Thanks to Ven. Chao Hwei, Ven. Shing Kuang, David Reid, Taiwan and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists for hosting the biennial INEB meeting.

Thanks to Anthony Walsh, Family Planning Queensland and the Australian Health Promotion Association for organising Colin's lecture tour in Queensland, Australia.

Special thanks to Ric and Jo Easton at Biodistributors in Sheffield, Tasmania for their continuing, generous support.

Please visit our website for detailed information and photos of all our current projects

We need your help

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has supported many exciting and innovative projects. To continue, we need your help. Please send your donation, in U.S. or Australian dollars, to an address below. Contact us for details of direct-debit facilities.

Donations by U.S. and Australian taxpayers are tax-deductible

Australian cheques must be made out to 'BODHI Australia Overseas Relief Fund' to be tax-deductible

**Founding Patron
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1989 Nobel Laureate for Peace**

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Prof. Solomon Benatar joins Advisory Board



We are honoured that Professor Benatar (left) has agreed to become BODHI's latest adviser. Solomon R Benatar, MBChB, DSc (Med), is Professor of Medicine at the University of Cape Town (UCT) and Founding Director of the UCT Bioethics Centre (1992-).

His current positions in addition to the above are: Chief Physician Groote Schuur Hospital (1980), South African Representative - The Novartis Foundation Scientific Advisory Panel (1998-), Visiting Professor in Public Health Sciences and Medicine, University of Toronto (2000-), and Director IRENSA - A US NIH Fogarty International Center Capacity Building program (2003-2010).

After graduating from the University of Cape Town in 1965, he trained in Anaesthetics and in Medicine in Cape Town and London. His academic interests include respiratory medicine, academic freedom, medical ethics and the humanities in medicine, human rights, health care systems, health economics and global health. Prof Benatar is a corresponding member of the US National Academy of Sciences' Committee on Human Rights and has been a Fellow in the Program in Ethics and the Professions at Harvard University and Visiting Professor at Harvard Medical School. He is an elected Foreign Member of the US National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Previous positions include: President of the International Association of Bioethics (2001-2003), and Chairman of the South African Interim National Health Research Ethics Committee (2001-2005).

Other professional activities include: Ethics Advisor to the Nelson Mandela Foundation (2003-), Medecins Sans Frontieres (2001-) and the HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) - Family Health International USA (2001-). Prof. Benatar

is an Elected Fellow of the Hastings Center, New York and of Imperial College London and Elected Honorary Fellow American College of Physicians and of the College of Physicians of South Africa.

Memberships include: Advisory Board Global Physicians and Lawyers for Human Rights (2000-); Drugs for Neglected Diseases Group; Medecins Sans Frontieres (2003-); Board of Directors Lung Institute University off Cape Town (1999-); International Medical Advisory Panel, International Planned Parenthood Federation (2004-), Scientific Advisory Committee of Centre for AIDS Programme of Research in SA (2001-), Board of Directors International Association of Bioethics (2001-2006), and Standing Committee on Ethics, Canadian Institutes of Health Research (2007-2009). Editorial activities include Advisory Boards: Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics and Editorial Boards; Public Library of Science Medicine; Clinical Ethics; HIV Medicine; BioMed Central: Philosophy, Ethics and Humanities in Medicine; and Public Health Ethics. Journal Reviewer for many journals including Social Science and Medicine, American Journal of Public Health; and Manuscript Reviewer for: Kluwer Press, Oxford U Press, Cambridge U Press and Princeton U. Press.

Prof. Benatar's current interests are in Global Health, International Research Ethics, HIV/AIDS, and Public Health Ethics. He advocates extending the bioethics discourse from the interpersonal level to the ethics of institutions and international relations, and consideration of upstream causes of poverty and disease as needing attention and rectification.

Nepal Green Tara Trust & Kathmandu Lesbians

Dr. Jane Stephens (Ven. Karunamati) has worked in Nepal since 1993 and established the Green Tara Trust in the UK in 1999. 'We aim to work with poor, rural communities where geographical access to healthcare and education is difficult,' she says.

In addition to childbirth-related problems and high infant mortality, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections are increasing rapidly in Nepal, mainly due to community fragmentation. Most affected women and girl children are marginalized, as are sex workers and Dalits. 'Our initial work focuses on the poorest 30% in these communities then expands to incorporate the whole community.

Our current programme is looking at the effect of health promotion on maternal, child and young people's sexual health in rural Nepal.' While the project has wide support, there is very little funding for Karunamati herself, so BODHI is donating A\$1,000/US\$893 for that purpose.

Karunamati has recently become involved with lesbians in Kathmandu. 'Sexual violation of people of all alternative sexualities is common and hidden from public view. The focus of the Blue Diamond Society, the main NGO working to support these groups, is for men who have sex with men due to the increased HIV risk incurred by penetrative

gay intercourse. This means they can get good NGO funding, but only for men who have sex with men. The Blue Diamond Society are supportive of lesbians but there is no funding to help them address their own health, education and advocacy needs. There seems to be a huge hole in the development input given to lesbians.

'The lesbians I have met ... would like help in improving their literacy, English and computing so that more jobs are open to them. They also need support in understanding their rights as employees as well as challenging any discrimination through the courts,' Karunamati says. 'A small amount of regular financial support would go a long way in assisting these women, and others like them, to live with more stability, positivity and self reliance.'

The amount that BODHI will donate is currently being determined.

New committee member

BODHI welcomes Mr. Kulottam Chakma (right) to our general committee. He writes, 'I hail from Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. CHT is the southeastern part of Bangladesh bordering India's northeast & Burma's Rakhaine state. From early age, I became aware of the suffering of my people (Chakma, Marma, Tripura and other ethnic minorities collectively known as Jummas). The suffering was caused by violence and discrimination deliberately inflicted by the government & majority population of Bangladesh. For example in 1971 soon after independence, I heard how the victorious Mukti Bahini (Freedom Fighters of Bangladesh) massacred hundreds of Chakma Buddhists in the northern part of CHT. Their



'crime' was that the Chakma king Raja Tridiv Roy supported Pakistan during Pakistan-Bangladesh civil war in 1971.

'Due to my background and shared experience of persecution, I developed a strong sense of responsibility, love and compassion to my community. The urge to help my community comes naturally to me. After graduation from the university in Dhaka, Bangladesh in 1987 & after working with Bangladesh Biman (national air carrier) for more than a year, I set off for Australia in 1989 to do Master of Electrical Engineering. Another reason I came to Australia was to help my community bring their plight to the knowledge of Australian lawmakers. But I was disappointed with the indifference and realised that self-help was our main way to survival. That's why I still continue to help my community.'