Freedom from war only if we follow the path of Buddha: PM Modi

The world is debating whether the 21st century would be Asia’s century ... (though) there may be differences over which Asian country would the 21st century belong to ... but an aspect possibly overlooked by those having this vision is that without Buddha, 21st century can never become Asia’s century,” Prime Minister Narendra Modi told delegates at the International Buddha Poornima Diwas Celebrations 2015 in New Delhi. Also seen are IBC Secretary General Ven. Lama Lobzang, Minister of State for Home Affairs Kiren Rijiju and Minister of State for Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation, Dr. Mahesh Sharma.

Poornima Diwas was organised by the International Buddhist Confederation with the support of Union Ministries of Home Affairs and Culture.

Modi said that the Buddha’s message of love and compassion would help Asia inspire the world as it deals with all-round strife and bloody conflicts. “Buddha is the one who will make Asia a source of inspiration for the world that is dealing with various problems. People are killing each other ... a large part of the globe is witnessing bloody strife ... in such a scenario, it is Buddha’s message of compassion and non-violence that will show the way to the world,” said Modi.

At the colourful event attended by over 2,000 people, it was announced that the Buddha Poornima or Vesak would now be an annual event to be celebrated officially by the Government of India. A national committee will be set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of State for Culture, with IBC as the coordinating and implementing organization, and its Secretary General as ex officio convener.

The Culture Minister has also recently announced that the Government is committed to building a grand Holy Relic Vihara in Delhi to consecrate the Kapilvastu relic currently housed in Delhi’s National Museum.

In addition, a 130-hectare Buddha Charita Path park in the middle of Delhi will be jointly developed by IBC and a national committee of experts and eminent personalities to showcase the Buddhist heritage of India and also as a walkthrough of Buddha’s life and teachings.
The celebrations this year were historic indeed. Four eminent scholars who have contributed a lifetime of dedicated work to the preservation of Buddhist philosophic knowledge, art, culture and heritage were honoured by the Prime Minister. They are: Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, art historian, eminent scholar and author; Dr. Lokesh Chandra, chairman of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and eminent scholar, historian and author; Prof. Krishna Nath, eminent Buddhist scholar; and, Prof. Rama Shankar Tripathy, eminent Buddhist scholar.

“Buddha’s three-word message—‘Be your own light’— said Prime Minister Modi, carried more weight than all management journals, lectures and books put together. We should be inspired by his teachings on compassion, working with consensus, welfare of others and sacrifice,” he said. He underlined that Buddha had prescribed an eight-fold path to salvation—right view, right thought, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right consciousness and right concentration.

On the personal front, the Prime Minister recalled how during his visits abroad, most host countries took care to incorporate a visit to a Buddhist temple into his programme. Recalling Chinese traveller Hieun Tsang’s visit to his native village Vadnagar in Gujarat, he said archaeological excavation had found the remains of a monastery there. “At Devni Mori in Gujarat, archaeologists have discovered a casket containing Buddha’s relic. I hope a big Buddhist temple will someday come up at the site,” he said.

The Minister of State for Tourism, Culture and Civil Aviation, Dr. Mahesh Sharma and the Minister of State for Home Affairs and the Chairman of the Celebration Committee, Shri Kiren Rijiju were also present. Ambassadors of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and representatives of US, Singapore, Thailand, Bhutan, Slovenia were among those present. Ministers Rajyawardhan Singh Rathore, Prakash Jawadekar, MPs Anurag Thakur, Thubsten Chewang, Ramdas Athawale, Tarun Vijay, Sudhanshu Mittal, Hindu spiritual leader Swami Chidanand Saraswati of Parmarth Niketan, Jain saint Acharya Lokesh Muni too were present.

A large number of monks, nuns and followers of Buddha Dharma from all over India attended the event. Special enclosures with large screens were placed in the lawns of the Talkatora stadium for the latecomers who could not be accommodated in the stadium, though it is one of the largest in New Delhi.

The cultural programme began with the Mangalacharan- chanting of sutras in Pali and Sanskrit traditions, songs by the Himalayan School students, songs by the children of the Shakya community and songs by the Ladakhi children’s choir from the Mahabodhi Higher Education School, Chandigarh.

Photos: Kshipra Simon

Special prayers for Nepal quake victims

On International Buddha Poornima Diwas celebrations in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi offers prayers for the people affected by the earthquake in Nepal, the birthplace of Buddha.

Making a special reference to Nepal, the land of Buddha’s birth, the Prime Minister said the country was dealing with a huge challenge post the earthquake. “Buddha’s message of compassion should inspire us to share Nepal’s sorrow and grief,” he said while praying to Buddha to “give Nepal the strength to deal with the unprecedented crisis”. He hoped the “beloved brothers” in Nepal would bounce back to life but said he felt the road to recovery would be long and arduous. The earthquake of 7.9 magnitude shook Nepal on April 25. Subsequently too, there were several tremors reported. So far, more than 7,000 people have been killed and thousands injured. The most severe damage was seen in Nepal’s capital, where buildings collapsed, burying people.

The evening culminated at the Asoka Mission, where the guests released colourful Korean lanterns.
Dialogue on Vinaya: A first in centuries

At a two-day Dialogue on Vinaya held on March 18-19, 2015, senior monks of the Nlanada tradition based in India, and high-ranking monks of the Theravada tradition from Sri Lanka discussed Vinaya, that includes guidelines, education and discipline within the various Buddhist traditions. Organized by IBC, this historic occasion also included a meeting of the visiting Sri Lankan delegation with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Practitioners of the faith belonging to both the traditions noted that this dialogue was taking place after hundreds of years. The known ancient texts mention congregations of this kind during the Kushan period, where the teachings would come up for discussion. But further research is called for on this matter.

Vinaya or the rules or guidelines that the Buddha passed on to his disciples, evolved in different forms, in different schools of Buddhism, as it spread through the disciples to different parts of the world. “Dialogues are imperative to iron out differences between different schools. Only when you talk to others, you understand them better and are able to work with them to create a better world... which is why we’re here to engage and learn from one another,” said Buddhist monks from both the Theravada and Mahayana traditions who met in New Delhi.

At the dialogue, scholars explained their respective Vinaya sutras. It may be recalled that the first ever Buddhist council was held soon after Buddha’s parinirvana, under the patronage of King Ajatasatru. It was meant to preserve Buddha’s teachings and monastic rules for monks. Most historians agree that the last great Buddhist Council in ancient times was held in 644 CE, during the reign of King Harshavardhana.

Vinaya literally means education or...
discipline. It is a framework of rules within which Buddhist monks live their lives and practised dharma. Eventually, these rules were written in different languages in canonical texts and were followed by Buddhists in different parts of the world, often in dissimilar ways. Sri Lankan Buddhists follow the Theravada vinaya preserved in Pali canon, while those following Nalanda tradition, also known as Sanskrit tradition and more popularly Tibetan Buddhism, follow the Mulasarvastivadavinaya canon conserved in Kangyur—words of the Buddha translated in Tibetan/Bhoti language.

“Buddhists have one common goal and that is to serve humanity. If followers of Buddha come together they will be able to serve humanity in a much better way,” says Ven. Khen Rinpoche Jangchup Choeden of the prestigious and ancient Gaden Shartse College in Karnataka, India. He refers to similarities between the two Buddhist traditions in the way they follow vinaya.

“Most vinaya rules are similar. For instance, in sanghadisesa or classification of the type of offences committed by monks there is mention that a monk cannot wrongly accuse another monk. Another similarity is that in aniyatas, (third level of offences) monks should abstain from sex. These are some of the common things,” says Khen Rinpoche.

This dialogue between the two oldest Buddhist traditions has helped Theravadin Buddhists to understand their Nalanda brethren in a better way. “There was a misconception that the Nalanda tradition practised in Tibet and Mongolia does not have a proper vinaya. Theravadin monks felt distant from Mulasarvasvadins. However, after the dialogue, both sides understood that there are no major differences. Both have the same vinaya tradition taught by the Buddha himself,” says Buddhist scholar Ven. Samdhong Rinpoche who also participated in this dialogue. Such was the impact of the dialogue that after talking to each other over two days, many wondered on the need of having separate traditions in Buddhism.

Anunayaka and General Secretary of the Kotte chapter of the Siyam Nikaya in Sri Lanka, Ven. Kotapittiye Rahula, strongly feels that there is no need for different traditions as they are all alike and follow the same Vinaya. “We are all followers of the historical Buddha, but after a few centuries, we went separate ways because of etiquette. Today, we have to see why we were separated. There are not many differences between schools. Now we are discussing why we were not able to work together all this while,” he says.

However, there are minor differences between the two traditions, which are mostly related to the climate in which each of these traditions blossomed. “Tibetan Buddhists wear thicker robes, which we cannot wear in tropical weather in Sri Lanka. We use a robe
that is prescribed by the Buddha. Buddhists in the north have to wear shoes and socks because of cold weather that we don’t need to,” explains Ven. Rahula Thero. Besides dress code, there are other minor differences that Sri Lankan monk Ven. Indrasara Thera highlights — “We have one vinaya code, upsampada or higher ordination. After higher ordination, a practitioner becomes a full-fledged monk. In Mulasarvasti-vada, the monk has a khammavagacharya, or external advisor for high ordination.

We don’t have such teachers in our traditions,” he adds.

Both Theravada and Mahayana Buddhists agree that differences can be sorted out for better coordination between the two Buddhist traditions and the dialogue should be extended to include Buddhists in different countries.

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Delegates from Nalanda tradition

1) His Eminence the Drikung Kyabgon Chetsang Rinpoche (Drikung Kagyu delegate)
2) Most Ven. Drepung Khentri Rinpoche Lobzang Tempa (Representative of H.E. Gaden Tri Rinpoche) Gelug delegate
3) Most Ven.Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche (Gelug delegate)
4) Ven. Khchen Lodro Donyo Rinpoche (Karma Kagyu delegate)
5) Ven. Khenpo Ogyen Tenzin (Nyinma delegate)
6) Ven. Khenpo Gyaltset (Karma Kagyu delegate)
7) Ven. Khenpo Nima Gyaltset (Drikung Kagyu delegate)
8) Ven. Khenpo Tenzin Kunga (Taklung Kagyu delegate)
9) Ven. Khenpo Jamyang Lekshe (Sakya delegate)
10) Ven. Shartse Khen Rinpoche Geshe Jangchup Choeden, (Gelug delegate)
11) Ven. Khangser Rinpoche (Gelug delegate)
12) Ven. Poonlob Thinley Nyima (Bon delegate)
13) Geshe Tenpa Phakchok (Assistant to Most Ven. Drepung Khentri Rinpoche)
14) Lama Oser Jungnay (Assistant to Ven. Khchen Lodro Donyo Rinpoche)
15) Ngodup Tsering Bukhar (Translator of Ven. Khchen Lodro Donyo Rinpoche)
16) Yundrung Kalsang (Assistant to Ven. Poonlob Thinley Nyima)

Delegates from Theravada tradition

1. Most Venerable Napana Pemasiri Mahanayake Thero, Mahanayake Ramanya Nikaya
2. Venerable Dr. Iththapana Dhammalankara Mahanayake Thero, Sivam Nikaya, Sri Jayawardenapura Kotte Sri Kalyani Samagri Dhamma Maha Sangha Sabawa
3. Venerable Thirikunamala Ananda Mahanayake Thero, Amarapura Sri Dharmarakshita Nikaya
4. Venerable Prof. Kotapiyie Rahula Thero, Anunayaka of the Kotte Chapter of the Sivam Maha Nikaya and Director, Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies
5. Venerable Anamaduwa Sri Dhammadassi Nayake Thero, General Secretary, Asgiriya Chapter
6. Venerable Dr. Godagama Mangala Thero, Principal Sri Chandananda Buddhist School, Kandy and Executive Member of Asgiriya Chapter
7. Venerable Banagala Upatissa Thero, President of the Mahabodhi Society of Sri Lanka
8. Venerable Prof. Gallele Sumanasiri Thero, Vice Chancellor, Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka
9. Venerable Prof. Ittademaliye Indasara Thero, Professor, Buddhist and Pali University of Sri Lanka

Assistants
10. Ven. Dakunu Doraiyadde Jinasingha Thero
11. Ven. Minipe Chandima Thero
12. Ven. Thiniyawala Dhammaratana Thero

Accompanied by
13. Mr. Jagath Sumathipala – President, IBC Sri Lanka Chapter
14. Dr. Daminda Porage – Coordinator, IBC Sri Lanka Chapter

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Excerpts included from the Special coverage by Speaking Tree of May 3, 2015, published by the Times of India. Photos: Kshipra Simon

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IBC Newsletter | 5
IBC joins relief efforts in Nepal

The Sri Lankan government has approved a proposal to support the re-construction of a Buddhist Monastery and a Hindu Temple damaged in the recent earthquake in Nepal. This request was placed by the Foreign Minister of Nepal. IBC Secretary General Ven. Lama Lobzang recently visited Kathmandu.

An IBC Nepal Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee has been set up to co-ordinate efforts by the IBC members worldwide for providing all kinds of assistance for the people of Nepal. The IBC Nepal chapter will be the implementing agency. The committee will consist of three key members of IBC: His Eminence Phakchok Rinpoche, Vice President; Ven. Khenpo Chimed, member of the Governing Council and its Working Group; and Ms. Ang Dawa Sherpa, Honorary Secretary and member, Working Group of the Governing Council. IBC Nepal is represented on the Committee by three members—Ven. Phupu Chhembe Sherpa (aka Ven. Thubten Jikdol), President, Nepal Buddhist Federation; Ven. Dharma Murti, Vice President, All Nepal Bhikkhu Federation; and Prof. Dr. Nareshaman Vajracharya, President, Nepal Traditional Buddhist Association. There are also other representatives from the three traditions—Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana—making it a 10-member group.

Among the first group of IBC members to send relief material were our members from Malaysia who sent a container with 1,000 tents immediately to Ms. Shakun Sherchan, Buddhist Peoples’ Rights Forum, Nepal. More containers are expected soon.

In the same spirit of extending all physical and material support, IBC Vice President, Ven. Thich Quang Ba, Founding Abbott, Van Hanh Monastery, and Sakyamuni Buddhist Centre of Australia led a nine-member delegation of Vietnamese monks and nuns from New Zealand and Australia to Nepal from June 9 to 15. The Quake Relief Mission brought gifts and funds from lay Buddhist community, which were distributed among around 3,000 severely affected families in the 10 most destroyed districts of Nepal.

IBC Secretary General Ven. Lama Lobzang joined the group in Kathmandu to co-ordinate the works and for supervising the setting up of committees. Describing the scenes of devastation, he said, “I was shocked to see frightened people all around. Destruction apart, there was a total breakdown of the human spirit when confronted by such phenomena of nature.
Though the buildings were standing, but the structures had become very weak, and the people were extremely frightened to go inside their homes. With one slight tremor the entire building would fall apart. Everyone was sleeping outdoors or inside tents at night. These structures have to be brought down and built anew,” he said.

“I was told that at one place around 500-600 people had died. There was not a single person to perform the last rites. There were machines digging up and around 40-50 people were being moved by machines and buried in these huge pits. There was no manpower to physically bury them. This left me stunned and speechless. I have never heard of this kind of destruction and human loss,” he added.

On the relief front, he said massive amounts of relief were pouring into the country but mostly in Kathmandu. However, the far flung remote areas, especially those that are inaccessible had been left out. IBC is targeting remote areas for support and relief work through its local members. The relief material was based on reports sent by IBC members in Nepal after studying the requirement. Local logistics support is being provided by Ven. Khenpo Chimed and monks from the Shanti Vihara.

Ven. Lama Lobzang called on the Ambassador of Nepal in India, His Excellency Mr. Deep Kumar Upadhyay, in New Delhi on June 8, 2015. They discussed relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts in Nepal by IBC and its member organizations.

The Ambassador suggested that IBC members should henceforth contribute money instead of material since the cost of transporting the material can be enormous and, therefore, a waste under the present circumstance. He said that the Government of Nepal is shortly going to announce what kind of contribution is required for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Further, the Nepalese government will soon be holding an expo in Kathmandu where various agencies and companies will display construction materials, including prefab material. He suggested that IBC Nepal should depute a team to visit the expo and see for itself the availability of materials and the cost involved per unit. This could then be communicated to all member organizations with the request that they contribute money towards specific reconstruction projects.

Text: Vichitra Sharma
Photos: Ven. Khenpo Chimed
IBC delegation meets President of Sri Lanka

An IBC delegation, led by the Secretary General, Ven. Lama Lobzang called on the President of Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr. Maithripala Sirisena at his residence in Colombo on 13 June 2015. Other members of the delegation were Deputy Secretary General, Dr. Harsha Kumara Navaratne, and President of the IBC, Sri Lanka chapter, Mr. Jagath Sumathipala.

The delegation requested the President to be Chief Guest at the proposed 150th year celebrations in India to mark the birth of the Sri Lankan reformer and revivalist, Anagarika Dharmapala, who founded the Maha Bodhi Society of India in 1891, and is credited with having revived Buddhism and Buddhist heritage in the country. The President accepted the request and promised a date in early October 2015.

The exact dates will be communicated by his office shortly.

The IBC delegation also discussed the proposed setting up of the twin Anagarika Dharmapala Centres for Buddhist Studies and Comparative Philosophies in India and Sri Lanka. The President assured them that the preliminary proposal would be forwarded to the Ministry of Buddhhasasana and Religious Affairs, and suggested that in the meantime IBC should prepare a detailed proposal.

With inputs from Jagath Sumathipala

ANAGARIKA DHARMAPALA CENTRE FOR STUDIES

Anagarika Dharmapala (17 September 1864 – 29 April 1933) was a Buddhist revivalist and writer from Sri Lanka who is credited with having pioneered the revival of Buddhism in India, where Buddhism had been almost extinct for centuries. He is also known to be the first Buddhist in modern times who preached Buddhism in three continents, namely Asia, Europe and North America. As reformer and revivalist, Anagarika Dharmapala’s work is symbolic of the symbiotic relationship that has existed between India and Sri Lanka for centuries.

About 2,600 years ago while sitting beneath the Bodhi Tree, after six years of strenuous practice to discover the path that leads to the end of suffering caused by greed, anger and hatred, and ignorance, Prince Siddhartha became the Buddha, attaining Full Enlightenment. In 1891 Dharmapala visited the Bodh Gaya Temple and the Sri Maha Bodhi tree and seeing the neglected condition of the temple vowed to rescue the holy place. He founded the Maha Bodhi Society of India, of which academicians Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee and Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee were later Presidents. Dr. Mookerjee was later one of the founders of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The society aimed at the revival of Buddhism in India and restoration of the ancient Buddhist shrines in Bodhgaya, Sarnath and Kushinagar. Anagarika spent the rest of his life to preserve the historical sites in India where the Buddha taught and lived; to protect the Buddhhasasana in Sri Lanka; and to disseminate the Dhamma throughout the world.

In 1893 Anagarika attended the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago representing the Maha Bodhi Society and the Buddhist world giving a speech, The World’s Debt to Buddha thoroughly impressing the participants. His well received lectures opened the eyes of Western intelligentsia to the greatness of Buddha Dhamma. It is here that he met another philosopher saint Swami Vivekananda from India. The bonding
IBC Secretary General Ven. Lama Lobzang visited the newly appointed Maha Nayake Thero of Asgiriya Chapter, Most Ven. Galagama Aththadassi Maha Nayake Thero, in Kandy, Sri Lanka, on June 14, 2015. In this meeting Ven. Lobzang explained IBC’s role to the Maha Nayake Thero and its current activities.

Further Ven. Lobzang invited the Maha Nayake Thero to serve in the Supreme Dharma council as the successor of the late Maha Nayake Most Ven. Udugama Sri Buddharakkitha Thero. The newly appointed Maha Nayake Thero expressed his extreme satisfaction on what the IBC is doing and accepted the invitation of Ven. Lama Lobzang. The Maha Nayake Thero promised to extend his fullest support to the IBC and blessed Ven. Lama Lobzang, the IBC and its membership in the name of Lord Buddha’s Holy Relics deposited at the ancient Mahiyangana Sthupa premises that the Buddha visited himself after nine months of his enlightenment. The Maha Nayake Thero is the Chief Incumbent Thero and the Custodian of the ancient Mahiyangana Sthupa.

Text & Photos: Dr. Damenda Porage

Meeting with new Maha Nayake of Asgiriya

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Text & Photos: Dr. Damenda Porage
Governing Council’s Working Group Meets

The Working Group set up by the Governing Council of IBC held a two-day meeting on 19 and 20 April 2015 to discuss several pending issues including operational issues, forging partnerships, Amendments to the IBC Constitution, Membership and Chapter Formation, Fundraising and functioning of the working group.

The other areas for discussion were planning new activities and looking at the proposed activities, use of IBC logo, foreign contributions, creating awareness about IBC, Buddhism as a part of the secular curriculum in education, membership and chapter formation, setting up a directory, communication with members in Chinese and the UN Day of Vesak celebrations.

It was proposed that having a detailed operational plan for 3 to 5 years was important as on its basis IBC would be able to approach prospective partners and funders. The group suggested that “We should prepare an Operational Plan under separate heads, and categorize each activity according to the Aims and Objects as mentioned in the IBC constitution.”

While allowing the use of the IBC logo by another organization for a joint programme, publication or otherwise, the relationship of the organization with IBC must be ascertained, i.e. whether the said organization is a partner/member/chapter of IBC. Chapters of IBC in different countries will use the IBC logo. However if another organization has been appointed as the IBC chapter in a particular country, it may use its own logo along with the IBC logo. For instance, since the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism is now an IBC chapter, it may use its own logo as well as the IBC logo for programmes, publications, and other...
Know your Patron

His Holiness Jinje -beopwon- 13th Supreme Patriarch of Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, South Korea

The Great Seon Master His Holiness Jinje-Beopwon is the spiritual leader of Korean Buddhism, which is composed of 20,000 monks and twenty million lay people. He was appointed unanimously to be the 13th Supreme Patriarch at the Council of Elders election on December 14, 2011. Master Jinje’s five year-term began on March, 2012. Supreme Patriarch Jinje stated in his acceptance speech, “I am very grateful that great masters from the Council of Elders have chosen me as the leader to represent the Jogye Order” and added, “I will follow suggestions from the Council of Elders to create peaceful future for Korean Buddhism. I will try my best to spread Ganhwa Seon, the essence of oriental spiritual culture, and to contribute to World Peace.” His long-term goal is to share Korean Buddhism and Ganhwa Seon with the whole world and to contribute to the realization of world peace.

The meeting was attended by:

1. Ven. Lama Lobzang (Secretary General) Chairman
2. His Eminence T.K. Lochen Tulku Rinpoche (Vice President) Member
3. Mr Jamie Cresswell (Vice President) Member
4. Prof. B. Mungekar (Deputy Secretary General) Member
5. Dr Harsha Kumara Navaratne (Deputy Secretary General) Member
6. Mrs Ang Dawa Sherpa (Honorary Secretary) Member
7. Dr Gregory Kruglak (Honorary Secretary) Member
8. Ven. Bhikku Sanghasena Mahathera (Treasurer) Member
9. Ven. Khenpo Chimed (Executive Member of the Governing Council) Member
10. Dr Damenda Porage (Executive Member of the Governing Council) Member
11. Mr Seshadri Chari Invitee
12. Mr Ashok K. Wangdi Invitee
13. Mr Kishore Thukral (Executive Director, Communications) Ex-officio
14. Ms Vichitra Sharma (Coordinator, PR and Media) Ex-officio

With inputs from Kishore Thukral
His Eminence Khamba Lama Damba Ayushev - Supreme Head of Russian Buddhists, Buryat Republic, Russian Federation

His Eminence Khamba Lama (Dam Badmaevich Ayusheev) was born on September 1, 1962 in village Shergoldzh in Krasnochikovskoi district, Chita region. In 1980 he graduated from Petrovsk Zabaikalskoe pedagogical school. He worked as Emchi Lama in Ivolginsky Datsan. In 1991 he was appointed Shireete Baldan Lama Datsan, Breybun village, Murochi Kyakhtinsky District, Republic of Buryatia, the first Datsan based in Russia and ethnic Buryatia. On April 28, 1995, he was elected XXIV Khambo Lama, chairman of the Central Spiritual Directorate of Russian Buddhists, whose legal successor is the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia. In August 1995 he was elected as member of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Organizations under the President of the Russian Federation. In 1998 he was included in the Presidium of the Interreligious Council of Russia.

OBITUARY / L.S. Cousins

With the death of Lance Cousins, we have lost a man whose life was devoted to both the study and the practice of Buddhist meditation and theory. He will be deeply missed, and the effects of his life’s work lasting.

Lance Selwyn Cousins was born in 1942 in Hitchin, Hertfordshire. He attended Letchworth Grammar and Hales Grammar. In 1961 he won a scholarship to read History at St John’s College, Cambridge. He changed to Oriental Studies, though a historical perspective never left his academic work. Whilst at Cambridge, he had met the man whom he regarded as his lifelong teacher. Boonman Poonyathiro (1932–) had trained at Wat Pailom in various forms of samatha practice at that time popular throughout Thailand. In Britain Boonman taught a variation on a traditional Thai practice based on samatha breathing mindfulness, the meditation said by the commentaries to have been undertaken by the Buddha on the night of the awakening. Lance instinctively felt that he had found a practice true to the Buddha’s original teachings on meditation. During this time Lance was involved with setting up the Samatha Trust and became its founding chairman (1973–1999). His success perhaps lay most in the one-to-one discussion that lies at the heart of the way this form of meditation is taught.

Whilst often busy with academic and personal teaching, Lance wrote some seminal articles, on oral literature, meditation and jhāna, during this time. He always felt, however, that he would like to pursue more academic research. Lance took early retirement and in 2000 moved to Oxford. He became a member of common room (2001–2007, 2009–2015) and a supernumerary fellow (2007–2009) at Wolfson College. He was made a member of the Faculty of Theology at Oxford University, where he taught and lectured on Pāli and Buddhist Studies.

At Oxford he undertook a considerable amount of academic work. He wrote extensively on Abhidhamma, Buddhist meditation, Pāli, Middle Indian and Buddhist Sanskrit textual studies, and the history of early Buddhist schools, particularly in the Southern Buddhist Tradition. Always primarily interested in the common sources of the modern meditative traditions, he had a special interest in Sanskrit Buddhist sources. He was working on a number of projects at the time of his death. He did not complete his translation of the Abhidhammāvatāra. A long-term planner, however, he left complete drafts of two books: a translation of the Yamaka and its commentary with Charles Shaw, and a history of aspects of Buddhist meditation. He knew that after two major heart attacks, he might not see these published. All through, he sustained his strong connections with the living traditions in South and Southeast Asia. He spent periods of practice, teaching and research in Sri Lanka and Thailand and encouraged the Samatha group learning chanting with Ajahn Maha Laow to make tours in Thailand. In all, his death, the day after completing teaching of a five-term Pāli course, finally studying the commentary of the Jarasutta (the ‘Discourse on Old Age’), came at a time of contented study, discussion and teaching.

His body remained at the Oxford Buddha Vihāra, where full funerary Abhidhamma chanting was performed. Ajahn Dhammasāmi presided over his funeral, which included chanting, recital of the Mettā Sutta in English, and recollections from his daughter. At the reception at Wolfson afterwards, Professor Richard Gombrich discussed his career as an academic, Dr Paul Dennison his association with the Samatha Trust, Professor Rupert Gethin his role as a teacher, and Dr Rajith Dissanayake his strong Sri Lankan connections. The family recounted memories from childhood. ■

Contributed by Keith Munnings
Korean Ambassador visits Bodh Gaya

The IBC, as part of its mandate of serving as a platform for preserving, developing and promoting the shared spiritual and cultural heritage, facilitated the visit of the Korean Ambassador and his delegation to the holy city of Bodh Gaya and the adjoining Buddhist pilgrimage destinations- Nalanda, Rajgir and Dhungeshwari.

The Korean delegation was led by His Excellency Joongyu Lee, the Ambassador of Korea, and included Mr. Kinkum-pyoung, Director Counselor, and Mr. Sunil Rawat, External Manager of the Korean Culture Centre, Delhi.

The Korean visit to Bodh Gaya gained added significance as it was a ‘research visit’ to understand the significance of Buddhism and Bodh Gaya prior to the State visit of the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Korea. This was a familiarization and fact-finding exercise for the Korean delegation for briefing the Korean government prior to the high level visit.

The IBC hosted a dinner in honour of the delegation where they held a meeting with senior officers of the Bihar government. Those present were the Commissioner, Magadh Division, Gaya, Mr. R. K. Khandelwal and the District Magistrate & Collector, Gaya District Mr. Sanjay Kumar Agarwal. The IBC team was led by His Eminence Lochen Tulku Rinpoche, Vice President with Ms. Vichitra Sharma the PR and Media coordinator. Also present was eminent Korean Monk, Ven. Pomnyun, founder of the Korean NGO- Join Together Society (JTS) in Dhungeshwari with other members of the NGO.

Venerable Pomnyun, a Ramon Magsaysay award recipient, has an NGO since 1991 where he runs educational, medical and village development programmes for about 10,000 village people in Dhungeshwari who are among the most backward in Bihar.

Earlier in the day, Ambassador Joongyu Lee addressed the press and also fielded a few questions from the media. To the delight of the Bihar media Mr. Lee mentioned that he too has some Indian ancestry. He narrated the story of how a Princess from Ayodhya who had arrived in a boat to Korea had married King Suro of Geumgwan Gaya. She, Heo Hwang-ok was the first queen of Geumgwan Gaya, and is considered an ancestor by several Korean lineages. He said almost 30 per cent of the Koreans have this Queen’s ancestry. The King’s family takes the name of Kim and as such the Heo and the Kims do not marry as they consider themselves as sisters and brothers. Both the Ambassador and the Director Counselor, he mentioned have some Indian DNA.

The Ambassador said for the Buddhists around the world Bodh Gaya was their spiritual home. The coming visit to Korea of the Indian Prime Minister will reinforce the traditional cultural and civilizational linkages between the two countries and also further develop economic and social ties.

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Text: Vichitra Sharma
Buddhist Heritage in Tripura

Archaeological explorations and excavations have substantiated two Buddhist centres in the north-east Indian state of Tripura. One of them is located at Shyam Sundar Tila in South Tripura district and the other site is located at Boxanagar in West Tripura district.

The ancient mound, locally known as Shyam Sundar Tila, is located in south Jolaiabari, Belonia sub-division of South Tripura district. The mound is situated on the west bank of the Pillak nala which flows a few metres away from the site and is surrounded by a cultivable plain landmass with alluvial soil cover.

The mound at present is spread over 1,260 sq.m., but due to gradual encroachment by the local people, it has already lost considerable area. The archaeological importance of the mound can be seen from the discovery of two stone images of Avalokitesvara and a number of terracotta plaques depicting figures of animal, birds, etc. Some of the plaques are now displayed in the State Museum at Agartala.

The site was first explored in a joint survey by ASI and the State Cultural and Tourism Department of Tripura in 1965-66 under the guidance of A. Ghosh of the Archaeological Survey of India and S. Banerjee, Director of Education, Government of Tripura. The ASI subsequently carried out limited excavation in 1984-85 and later a comprehensive excavation was undertaken from 1998-2001 and complete plan of the brick-built stupa was expressed along with discovery of large number of terracotta plaques. The stupa, cruciform on plan, is almost identical to the Paharpur stupa in Bangladesh.

The brick-built stupa is pancharatha on plan intervened by the four wide openings in four cardinal directions. There are two pradakshinapathas, one at the outer edge of the stupa while the other is the inner pradakshinapatha close round the medhi, the extant remains of which were found up to 1.70 m from its floor level.

The beauty of the stupa is enhanced by friezes of terracotta plaques comprising Dhyani Buddha and various gods of Brahmanical pantheon like Ganesha, Narasimha and other divine figures. A number of terracotta plaques also depict contemporary socio-cultural scenes such as musicians, drummers, dancers, gandharvas, kinnaras, archers, warriors and human figures besides a number of plaques depicting the faunal and floral motifs. Mention may be made of plaques depicting duck, parrot, peacock, eagle, snakes, fish, makara, elephant, tiger, lion, camel, fox, deer, bull, buffalo and monkey.

Among the stone sculptures, mention may be made of Buddhist deities and Avalokitesvara Padmapani made on fragile sandstone standing in samapada posture over a carved lotus. The left hand of the figure is shown holding a padma while the right hand is in varada mudra. The divine figure is flanked by two devotees, one of them is a male figure shown in clubbed hands in anjali mudra while the other is a female figure standing in samapada posture over the basement. Stylistic features of the image show a resemblance with the Pala School of art and can be assigned to c. 9th century CE.

The structural mound at Boxanagar is located on the northern bank of a rivulet named Harimangal and is about 40 km west of state capital Agartala, in the West Tripura district near the Indo-Bangladesh border. The adjoining areas along the border are full of archaeological remains especially in the adjacent Comilla districts, Bangladesh, formerly known as Tipperah.

The structural activity at the mound is spread over an area of about three acres. The excavation work was undertaken in the south-western corner of the mound which revealed a massive brick-built stupa of triratha plan. The stupa consists of a large basement and is made of eight mouldings with gradual decreasing order in upward direction, over which the gradually tapering medhi is beautifully set with burnt bricks with the help of mud mortar. Evidence of the collapsed portion of the harmika is noticed on the western side of the stupa. The cause of the damage may be attributed to natural factors. The chamber of the harmika is also square in plan.

In the second season, a chaityagriva came to light on the eastern side of the stupa. The plan of the exposed chaityagriva is rectangular and aligned in east-west direction. The superstructure is damaged except for the side wall which has survived approximately 1.65 m from the foundation level. The construction pattern of the chaityagriva appears very simple. It shows that the larger rectangular plan encloses a proportionately smaller rectangular structure, leaving a gap of 1.45m on three sides. The walls of the chaityagriva are joined with the walls of the stupa on one
side. The walls are thick, measuring up to 1.25m which might have supported the superstructure. The central vacant space might have been used for congregation of the devotees for prayers. The walls are robbed at many places. Only 28 extant courses of burnt bricks have been found. Mud mortar has been used for joining the burnt bricks in the structure. A small staircase was provided on the eastern side of the structure to enter the chaityagriha.

Excavation of the central chamber of the stupa yielded about 150 clay sealings of Buddhist creed. A number of clay votive stupas were also found. A notable discovery was a clay figurine of a headless Buddhist deity with four hands seated in padmasana.

Antiquities found from the chaityagriha are mainly of terracotta comprising mostly bricks with kumuda motifs, fragments of two vases, one terracotta spindle whorl, hopscotch, one iron pin, etc.

A small quantity of redware sherds of coarse to fine fabric, mostly wheel-turned were found from the site. Majority of the shapes are represented by vases and handis of different variety made of the fine levigated clay and well burnt. Most of the sherds are plain, devoid of external decorations but some of the sherds found had external impressions like the back of a tortoise, etc.

Since the structural remains of the chaityagriha are interlocked with the stupa, it suggests that both belong to the same phase. The date of the stupa is tentatively ascertained from the stylistic pattern of the writings of the Buddhist creeds found in the clay sealings. Considering the paleography of the writing and the ceramic assemblages found in the vicinity of the chaityagriha, it can be presumed that the chaityagriha is contiguous to the stupa and stylistically can be assigned to circa 7th-8th century CE.

It will not be out of place to mention here that the copper plate inscription which was found during the course of excavation at Mainamati in Bangladesh provided important information about the two new dynasties of ‘Devas’ and ‘Khadgas’. They ruled from the middle of 7th-8th century CE and seem to be contemporary to the early Palas. Excavated materials at Mainamati further revealed that the rulers of both the dynasties followed Buddhism as the state religion.

Scholars have identified the seat of the government of the Khadgas as “Jayakarmanta Vasaka” identified with Badakamma, a locality 12 miles west of Comilla in Bangladesh. On the other hand, the Devas set their capital at Mainamati, now located in Bangladesh. Considering all the available evidences, it appears that the Buddhist centre of Boxanagar may have belonged to the Khadgas who ruled mid-7th-8th century CE from their capital located near Comilla. The locality of Boxanagar is hardly 4-5 km away from Comilla.

Another notable feature is the non-availability of icons, which was common with rulers of the Palas. This is despite the availability of sandstone at several places for making the icons. This suggests that the Buddhist centre was not in the domain of the Palas although on the basis of architectural details and cultural assemblage of the site, it can be hypothesized that the religious establishment at Boxanagar was perhaps much influenced by the theology of Hinayana Buddhism during the 7th-8th century CE. Further excavation may provide more light in this direction. However, one thing is certain—the discovery of the Buddhist centre in Boxanagar has opened a new chapter in the cultural history of Tripura.

Text & Photos: Haji Dr. Syed Jamal Hasan, Director (Archaeology), ASI

Views of the excavated remains at Shyam Sundar Tila, South Tripura District.
The International Buddhist Confederation (IBC) is a Buddhist umbrella body that serves as a common platform for Buddhists worldwide. It currently has a membership comprising more than 300 organizations, both monastic and lay, in 39 countries.

Headquartered in New Delhi, the IBC is the outcome of the historic Global Buddhist Congregation held in November 2011 in New Delhi, wherein 900 delegates from all over the world, representing the entire Buddhist world, resolved to form an umbrella Buddhist world body based in India, the land of Buddha’s enlightened awakening and origins of Buddha dharma. The leadership of the IBC comprises the supreme religious Buddhist hierarchy of all traditions and countries as Patrons and members of our Supreme Dhamma Council.

As per its motto, "Collective Wisdom, United Voice", the IBC provides a common platform to all followers of the Buddha Dharma worldwide to address issues that are of both Buddhist and global concerns.

“Promoting inter-faith understanding is among the main areas of focus of the IBC, and it therefore endeavours to promote the universal nature of the basic goodness of all religions, interdependence and universal responsibilities,” says Venerable Lama Lobzang, Secretary General, IBC.

**Mission**

To gather the collective wisdom of Buddhists around the world to speak with a united Buddhist voice; to make Buddhist values part of global engagement while working to preserve and promote Buddhist heritage, traditions and practices.