

BODHI TIMES

December 1997, No. 13

Newsletter of

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI)

THE FACE OF BODHI

Schoolchildren, Northeast Thailand.
Courtesy of Maya Gotami Foundation.

US board member Dr. Martin Rubin
and wife Carol, a longtime supporter.

Donor Brenda Williams, Sudan
United Mission, Lake Chad, Africa.

CLOCKWISE CENTRE LEFT: ① Launch, Global Eco-Health Network (GEHN), London, Councillor Ann Mallinson, BODHI adviser Prof. John Guillebaud, Drs. Bret Hart and Colin Butler, Prof. Tony McMichael and Drs. John Cullity and Nikos Zafos. *Courtesy of GEHN;* ② BODHI adviser Sr. Mila de Gimeno, Filipina Catholic nun and activist; ③ Ven. Tenzin Wangchuk with his homegrown vegetables, S. India; ④ Schoolchildren, Massihi Gyanoday Abhiyan, (MGA), Bihar, India. *Courtesy of MGA;* ⑤ Tenpa TK delivering a health talk, Tibetan villages, India.

MUMBAI, THE BOY CHILD & THE MOBUTO

Despite visa obstacles, tummy upsets, the inscrutability of railway booking staff and monsoonal floods in Mumbai (Bombay), I recently survived my seventh journey to Mother India. Four days before returning to Australia, flooding disrupted all forms of transport, including my train. I spent my last night in India making a 16-hour, 400-mile (600-kilometre) bus journey from Hubli, in Karnataka, to Mumbai. We crossed a mountain at dawn. This involved a long, snaking descent along a divided road clogged with trucks and buses, into a waterfall-encrusted valley, the site of another nameless city.

Travelling in India, populated by more than 96 crore people (1 crore: 10 million) has not got easier. Since my first visit in 1985, the population has increased by almost 200 million--this in a country with two percent of the total global land surface. By comparison, Australia has about four percent of the total global land surface, and the US five percent.

In Mumbai, ancient yellowed buildings sprout trees from their walls. Here a broken pipe cascades grey water four storeys to the street below; there another child squats to defaecate and more people camp under the freeway. Although still plentiful, beggars with hands and feet deformed by leprosy seem less common than before. In Hubli I passed a man hiding his face, his nose eroded, perhaps from leprosy or yaws.

In Hyderabad, the Indian parasitology society hosted an international meeting to celebrate the centenary of the British Indian Sir Ronald Ross's discovery that malaria is transmitted by mosquitoes. The starting price for conference-arranged hotels was US\$50 a night, considerably more than I was paying for board in London. Even the rich cannot escape for long the crowding, the dirt, the open defaecation, the squalor and the garbage. A number of factors cause India's relative and absolute poverty. India, like other countries in the South, has for the past 200 years

supplied cheap goods and labour to the wealthy and powerful nations. Mid-eighteenth century India¹⁵ was comparatively rich and advanced in textiles, ship building, glass and metal making. British domination has been followed by a US-dominated international economic order which, despite contrary rhetoric, benefits from Third World poverty (Noam Chomsky: *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*. Verso, London, 1993).

Some faults spring from the Indian side, including both the dearth and the poor quality of primary education. Education that reaches the poor emphasises rote learning rather than understanding and questioning. The caste system, whatever its past justification, perpetuates modern poverty and backwardness. Corruption, brain drain and militarism also play roles in perpetuating poverty. So does resistance to decentralisation, which means that the centre is ever-expanding and expending resources, trying to keep the country glued together.

'BIHARI MOBUTO' IMPRISONED

BODHI Times readers may remember my description of recent Bihar governor, Mr Laloo Yadav Prasad, as an Indian Mobuto. As investigations into the multi-crore rupee fodder scandal deepened, Laloo was sacked as governor, at the same time foiling his critics by handing control to his allegedly illiterate wife. In his five-star prison, Laloo was attended by one of the country's leading cardiologists after suffering chest pain. His imprisoned status has not prevented him receiving frequent visits from the administrators of India's poorest state.

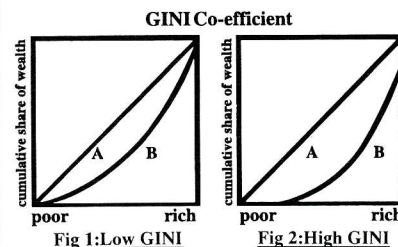
GREENHOUSE, STORMS & EL NINO

As we go to press, the Kyoto climate conference is about to begin. The drought and famine in New Guinea and the haze over Southeast Asia (from fires normally doused by the monsoon) are acknowledged consequences of the

recent intense El Nino. As the cyclone season opened in October, a terrifying storm hit the Cook Islands, in the South Pacific. Four-metre waves submerged the entire atoll, forcing people to cling to any refuse as makeshift rafts. The intensity and early arrival of this storm may be related to the unusually warm ocean associated with El Nino in the central and eastern Pacific. Soon after, the very severe Typhoon Linda caused extensive flooding by sea water, threatening food shortages in Vietnam.

CORRECTION

In BODHI Times No. 12, Figure 2 of the GINI co-efficient, a measure of income distribution, was mislabelled as low, i.e., the same as Figure 1. The co-efficient is the ratio $A/(A+B)$. When income is more evenly distributed, the area "A" is low, making $A/(A+B)$ small. Some readers have asked me what GINI means. Economist Amartya Sen attributes it to Mr. Gini, in 1912.



Even if, as is increasingly speculated, El Nino is not related to the greenhouse effect, these sea surges are frightening signals for people living in small island states and delta regions such as Bangladesh (see p.4).

PASSINGS

We note with regret the passing of BODHI supporter Venerable Geshe Adha, a Tibetan monk from Kham who fled the Chinese and escaped to northern India. Geshela was with Drepung Monastery. We will miss him greatly.

VOLUNTEERS

BODHI volunteer Robert Miller taught English to Tibetans in India. He writes:

"I knew very little about the plight of Tibetans in Tibet and in exile. I was privileged to meet with the Dalai Lama for an hour with other volunteer workers. He stressed the importance of input from those in the West for the success of the Tibetan cause. I also listened to accounts by my students of escape from Tibet and imprisonment in Nepal. I will always remember their courage, sense of spirit, inner calmness and fun.

"My gratitude for my 4 1/2 months in Dharamsala is profound. I possess an inner calmness I didn't have before. My hope is that many more people will have a Himalayan experience similar to my own".

PENPALS

Since Susan's talk to twenty children and one dog at the Campbell Town District High School in Tasmania, eleven students have written to Sister Jessie's schoolchildren in Bihar, India. BODHI will act as the clearinghouse for the children's aerograms, numbering and tracking them. The high risk of postal theft in Bihar precludes sending photos and parcels, which the Australian schoolchildren would prefer.

Teachers are seeing unexpected benefits. "Sometimes some of these children have difficulty expressing their feelings", Grade 6 teacher Sally Crosswell says. "To write to children who obviously have less than they have is a great way of helping them to do this". BODHI funds Sister Jessie's supplies and postage.

A special thank you

to Luiz Ribeiro, who makes a monthly donation to BODHI through his bank.
Sound like a good idea?

....The next **BODHI TIMES** begins a series featuring the work of our advisers, leading with Professor John Guillebaud.....**BODHI AUSTRALIA** director Dr Damien Morgan has resigned to concentrate on other commitments, many involving Tibetans. Good luck, and thank you, Damien.....

BANGLADESH: SOCIAL CHANGE AND LITERACY

Dr Denis Wright confesses that it felt like smoking the equivalent of sixty cigarettes a day when air pollution levels in Dhaka reached their peak. Fellow BODHI director Colin Butler also was invited to this conference. Although unable to attend, his abstract and paper will appear in the published proceedings. Denis reports:

In November, I presented a paper entitled "A Quarter-Century of Political and Social Change in Bangladesh" at the inaugural biennial conference of the Bangladesh Sociological Association in Dhaka, attended by the several hundred delegates. With a recurring focus on gender, health, ecological and population studies, Bangladeshi scholars revealed a keen awareness of the range of problems confronting their country as rapid urban growth outpaces infrastructure.

AFTER Grameen Bank, WHAT?

My hostess, Tahsinah Ahmed, has developed a remarkable village

literacy program that has attracted enormous interest from UN agencies. It is directed exclusively at women; in fact, current participants are all women who have taken out Grameen Bank loans and are having success with them. They have had a big boost to their confidence and now feel able to learn to read and write.

Previous impediments were the cost of the materials and teachers. Although moderate by most standards, the cost was usually so high that women preferred to put their limited savings and time into projects providing more immediate benefit for themselves and their families.

NUTS AND BOLTS

This programme costs them very little and takes only a couple of hours per week. Women bring written items from their homes. They divide into small groups. Words are taken from these items and written by a teacher

into a little sentence on a paper strip. Each word is learnt as a whole. The strip is then cut up into the individual words, used like flashcards until known thoroughly by all group members and swapped round so that all of the groups can share. The words are then cut up into characters, which the village women help each other to learn. Each has her own writing book (the only thing they have to buy) and can create her own dictionary.

ONE WOMAN'S TRIUMPH

In the past, the biggest problem was to persuade village women to attend literacy classes. That is no longer the case. It is now a social event. Women learn about things in their immediate lives and experience. For example, one woman was ecstatic that she could now read a letter from her son all by herself. She was now helping teach her friends the words she had learnt. I am sure that you will hear much more about this in the future.



EXCLUSIVE POSTER OF HIS HOLINESS XIV DALAI LAMA

BODHI is proud to offer a 20" x 23" (50cm x 58 cm) colour portrait-poster of His Holiness XIV Dalai Lama, photographed at dawn in Central Park, New York. Poster design is of the highest quality, with maroon border and saffron lettering. Art photographer John Bigelow Taylor has generously donated this image to BODHI and supervised poster production. New York graphic designer Kuan Chang has kindly donated his design talents.

Exclusive offering from BODHI. Price: from \$20-\$30 (your choice). Orders of more than 10: \$15 each OR make us an offer.

WHAT IS BODHI?

Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI) focuses on sustainable ways to improve health, education, the environment and human rights, particularly in developing countries. BODHI was founded in 1989 on the principles of skillful and compassionate action.

BODHI is neither religious nor political. We have supporters and advisers from many faiths. We ask for a kind heart and practical assistance.

Realising the interdependence of all beings is in our enlightened self-interest. If we don't work together to reduce the world's much-discussed problems, then who will?

WE NEED YOUR HELP

Thanks to your generosity, BODHI has been able to begin some exciting and innovative programs. We need your donations to continue. Please send your cheque, payable in US or Australian dollars, to an address below.

US donations are tax-deductible

BODHI Times is the biennial newsletter of Benevolent Organisation for Development, Health & Insight (BODHI).

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**We greatly value your support and keep our
mailing list confidential.**

... OTHER PROJECTS ...

CHW REFRESHER COURSES

- Thanks to the continuing generosity of the Australian Tibetan Society, BODHI has received funds to send six Tibetan monastic community health workers (CHWs) for refresher courses. CHWs are taught theoretical and practical health and services, community sanitation and hygiene, as well as first aid and basic clinical skills. Courses take an integrated approach that includes self development, care of minor ailments, nutrition, control of communicable diseases, identifying community health problems and promotion of safe drinking water. Other topics are assessing and referring patients, and the recording of basic clinical and other medical records. The fee for a three-month course is IRs 6,000/- per student. The course has high standing: recently one CHW was offered work in a Christian mission hospital (he declined).

CHAKMAS

- We have received several requests for construction projects from Chakmas (a Buddhist minority group originally from Bangladesh, many of whom live as refugees in India), which so far we have had to decline. We are discussing small-scale health projects with Ven Priya Pal Bhikku at the Chakma Buddhist Foundation in Bodh Gaya, India

BICYCLES FOR SCHOOLCHILDREN

- BODHI has increased its annual donation to the Maya Gotami Foundation's bicycles-for-schoolchildren project in Northeast Thailand to USD200.



A CLASTE SYSTEM?

After completing his M.Sc. in Epidemiology at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Colin will start a Ph.D. at the Australian National University in Canberra in 1998. His thesis will be entitled: 'Analysis of the global "claste" system: a tool for ecological disentanglement?'

INTERSECTION

This proposed work lies at the intersection of international health, ecological economics and environmental change. It argues for recognition of a "claste" system, a neologism created because neither 'class' nor 'caste' seems adequate to describe the obscene disparity in access to rights, wealth and health. Analysed this way, the effects of climate change, denial of Native Title and suffering of Rwandan refugees are discounted because harm falls overwhelmingly upon the third and fourth clastes, while the first claste sets policy with its second-claste administrators.

THANK YOU

In memoriam. Helen Mueller has made a donation in memory of her father, Alex Altergott, who passed away recently.

Uno's story. Our donors come in all shapes and forms, as Robyn Murray writes from Lismore, NSW, Australia:

"Uno, our very aged, demanding and cool, cool cat, got quite sick recently with kidney trouble. He got into a fight and ended up with a big hole in his head. One night Uno didn't come home after being off his food all day. By morning I was super worried and waited anxiously for daylight to search for his body. I was lying in bed madly promising God what I would do if He allowed Uno to turn up alive ... then said okay a \$100 extra to BODHI for Uno. I got up in the grey light, peered out my window and there he was, alive and wanting his breakfast pronto! So the \$100 extra is from His Majesty, Numero Uno, a Balmain Boy born and bred".

Thanks, again, to the **Australian Tibetan Society** for A\$1600 for refresher courses for community health workers.