

REPORTS

Sakyadhita Conference In Lumbini

From February 1st to 7th, 2000, the 6th Sakyadhita International Conference on Buddhist Women was held in the Ven. Dhammavati's convent, Gautami Vihara, in Lumbini, Nepal. The theme of the conference was 'Women as Peacemakers: Self, family, community, and world'. Sakyadhita, headed by Karma Lekshe Tsomo, an American nun ordained in the Tibetan tradition and based at the East-West Center, University of Hawaii, is an organization whose objective is to connect Buddhist women throughout the world. Previous conferences have been held in Sarnath, Bangkok, Colombo, Leh, and Phnom Penh. Buddhist nuns, laywomen, and academics came from around the world to attend. Nuns from Spiti and Dharamsala in India were joined at Lumbini by nuns from other Asian countries including Cambodia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Burma, Korea, China, and Japan, as well as many Western nuns. A particularly large contingent of Gelukpa nuns travelled from Dharamsala.

The Nepalese Minister for Youth, Sport, and Culture, Sharad Singh Bhandari, opened the conference in the presence of many dignitaries. The local CDO, Gyan Kaji Shakya, gave a short speech in which he mentioned that a feasibility study had been completed on whether an international airport could be established near Lumbini. The Ven. Ashvaghosh Mahasthavir spoke in favour of gender equality and full bhikkhuni ordination. The Ven. Dhammavati apologized for the fact that Gautami Vihara was not yet completed, but pointed out that, whereas the other viharas that are complete in Lumbini have been funded at the governmental level, her convent is entirely dependent on the donations that have been made to bhikkhunis in Nepal.

The conference included many academic sessions, chanting according to different Buddhist traditions, meditation, and a cultural show put on by the Nepal Bhasha Misa Khalah. Most important, it provided an opportunity for Buddhists from many countries to meet and exchange ideas, to make new friends and to deepen old friendships.

David N. Gellner and Sarah LeVine

Britain-Nepal Academic Council formed in London

A meeting of British academics and researchers interested in various aspects of Nepal, including art, archaeology, anthropology, language, literature, music, economy, law, politics, and nutrition etc., has decided to establish a Britain-Nepal Academic Council. The meeting was held recently at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and was attended by interested academics and researchers from universities all over the U.K. Michael Hutt of SOAS chaired the meeting.

The objective of the Council is to promote academic and scholarly links between Britain and Nepal through, inter alia, collaborative research, exchange programmes and organisation of annual lectures, and seminars etc. on areas of mutual interests of both the British and Nepalese academics and researchers.

The members appointed to the Council by the meeting include: Dr Michael Hutt of SOAS, University of London, Dr Judith Pettigrew of the University of Cambridge, Dr Rachel Baker of the University of Edinburgh, Professor David Seddon of the University of East Anglia, and Dr David Gellner of Brunel University, London, and Professor Surya Subedi of Hull University (Chair).

Welcoming the participants to the meeting, the Royal Nepalese Ambassador to London, Dr Singha B. Basnyat, said that the establishment of such a Council would further enhance the centuries-old friendly relations subsisting between the two countries. Announcing the formation of the Council to an audience of British well-wishers of Nepal at the Brunei Gallery of SOAS, University of London, Sir Tim Lankester, the Director of SOAS, said that his institution was proud of its record of academic and research activities on Nepal and was delighted to host such a meeting.

The academics, researchers and other distinguished delegates from different walks of British life were entertained later in the same evening by a group of popular classical musicians, Sur Sudha, invited from Nepal. The cultural programme was followed by a dinner of Nepalese cuisine hosted by the Ambassador at the Royal Nepalese Embassy where the academics and researchers had the pleasure of meeting and interacting with Mr Madhav Prasad Ghimire, one of the greatest poets of Nepal and the former Chancellor of the Royal Nepal Academy.

- Surya Subedi