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The Future of Thai Monarchy



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* Bhikkhu Buddhadasa

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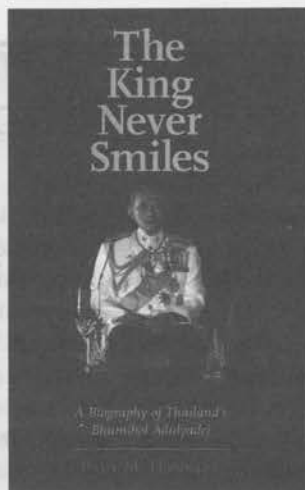
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The goals of INEB are to:

1. Promote understanding and co-operation among Buddhist countries, different Buddhist sects, and socially conscious Buddhist groups.
2. Facilitate and carry out solutions to the many problems facing our communities, societies, and world.
3. Articulate the perspective of Engaged Buddhism regarding these problems and train Buddhist activists accordingly.
4. Serve as a clearing house of information on existing Engaged Buddhist groups.
5. Cooperate with activists from other spiritual traditions.

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Reflection on Thai Monarchy

More broadly, the social efforts of the royal family and the charities themselves need to stop competing with the government and other charity and social operations, including public and private NGOs. This antagonism undermines the throne's unifying role. Instead, the royal family must become a partner with these organizations, not claiming to be the sole source of compassion within the country but simply an exemplary one that can make things happen.

This acknowledgment should also extend to the throne's award of royal honors and medals. During the entire Ninth Reign, the palace has refused to recognize prominent contributors to Thailand's development and unity who do not also contribute to royal power. The great men of Thai history are all kings and princes, and the great men of modern Thailand all dedicated royalists. Excluded from this list are non-royalists like Pridi Banomyong, the late world-renowned monk Buddhadasa, and many widely respected social workers outside the royal umbrella who have been implicitly regarded as rivals.

This stance is unnecessary and counterproductive. The monarchy can and must broaden its support base by recognizing achievement and honesty rather than simple loyalty, or risk being left behind by modern culture. The British throne grants knighthoods to artists, musicians, and social workers, among others, people without any traditional connection to Buckingham Palace who nonetheless help shape and define modern Britain in positive ways. In turn, the monarchy appears modern and virtuous, able to recognize selflessness and goodness outside its own elite circles. Expanding its recognition of achieving Thais would enable the modern Chakri throne to maintain its reputation for generosity and wisdom in a way that the secular government cannot. The throne can remain a moral leader.

from *The King Never Smiles: A Biography of Thailand's
Bhumibol Adulyadej*

by Paul M. Handley 2006, Yale University Press (last page).

Editorial Notes

The full moon day of October will mark the 50th anniversary of Dr. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism. Great events will be organized in India. INEB had already held its international gathering at Nagpur last year in the presence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and dignitaries from many countries. This year, INEB's executive secretary, Lapapan Supamanta, will be there again.

The drawing on the front cover of this issue is by Savi Sawakar, an Ambedkarite Buddhist. It belongs to Professor Nakamura Hisashi of Ryukoku University, who has kindly allowed us to reproduce it in order to remind our readers to think about millions of our fellow Indian Buddhists who are struggling for their dignity nonviolently. Last year, His Holiness gave them much courage to grow spiritually and socially in the Dhamma.

As for Siam, since 9th June of this year H.M. the King has been on the throne for 60 years—the longest reigning monarch in the world at present. On the eve of his birthday last year (4th December), His Majesty declared that he would welcome any constructive criticism. He stated that filing a charge of lese majeste against anyone is in fact hurting (not protecting) him personally and is directly or otherwise undermining the monarchy. Yet, it seems that the present government has turned a deaf ear on the King's advice. For instance, it has abusively used the lese majeste charge, employing it as a means to discredit oppositional voices, including our publisher, Sulak Sivaraksa. There was an attempt to arrest Sulak on 24th July; the Thai Rak Thai party (TRT) had also tried to organize a mob to harm him physically. Indeed the late Dr. Puey Ungphakorn, the most harmless person in the history of the Thai ruling class, was almost mobbed to death on 6th October 1976.

In April this year a mob provoked or paid by the TRT barricaded the *Nation* newspaper's office building, forcing it to suspend the publication of its Thai edition (*Khom Chut Luek*) for five days. The same mob planned to surround Sulak's residence, but it changed its mind at the eleventh hour. Mr. Sathien Viproma, in the name of the People's Network for Nation, Religion and Monarchy, filed a charge of lese majeste against Sulak Sivaraksa on 8th April. Yet he is now in jail for three months for defaming the Criminal Court; he had led a mob to challenge the Court, which was about to pass its judgment on the three remaining election commissioners (two others had already voluntarily resigned) for abusing their power and for corruption. The three election commissioners were sentenced to imprisonment for four years.

Yet the political situation in Siam is not yet bright. Thaksin Shinawatra, the caretaker prime minister, is employing every means, legal or otherwise, to hang on to power. He has even challenged the King (directly or indirectly) despite his claim as a loyal subject to the throne. In this issue, we publish a number of articles on the Siamese monarchy.

The good news is that on 18th August the Criminal Court acquitted Sulak Sivaraksa, who had been arrested for obstructing the Yadana gas pipeline since 6th March 1998. For more information please refer to p.13 and *A Tale about People and A Pipeline* by Danny Campbell (Bangkok, 2003).

The bad news is that there is a warrant of arrest for lese majeste on Sulak Sivaraksa. He submitted himself to the police on 21st August and is now out on bail. The police referred the case to the Public Prosecutors on 5th September.

Throughout this year, the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation (SNF) has collaborated with the Royal Thai Government and various NGOs to celebrate the centenary of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa domestically as well as internationally in the hope that his message would still be relevant to the world, especially in applying Dhammic Socialism appropriately—employing creative art as well as intellectual discussion to conscientize the people to be aware of the new and demonic religion of globalization and monoculturalism dominated by American imperialism and TNCs in order to emancipate them from greed (economism), hatred (dictatorship of any form), and delusion (indoctrinated by the mainstream mass media and education). The SNF is active in the fields of alternative education, economics, and politics.

Debating Thaksin between the Li(n)es: The PM's Letter to President Bush

Caretaker Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's 'personal' letter to US President George W. Bush dated 23 June 2006 has stirred yet another political firestorm. Far more worrisome than whether or not it lacks diplomatic propriety are the representations of the political and democracy that pervade the letter. The letter raises many questions, many which cannot be answered, but it doesn't mean that they shouldn't be asked. All things considered, the letter may be interpreted as a trial balloon. It signifies Thaksin's war cry against his domestic 'opponents', a war cry that he either wants Dubya to go along with or at least turn a blind eye to—just to be on the safe side.

Thaksin begins the letter expressing his "high personal regard for you [Bush] and for your leadership." This might have been expressed out of sheer politeness. But it is strange to have high regard for someone who is a staunch advocate of unilateralism and preventative war and of compulsion rather persuasion, one who has launched two shady if not outright illegal wars in the past few years. This is someone who in another 'world order' would be branded and hunted down as war criminal. And millions of people worldwide came out to protest against both wars. It is strange to laud Bush's leadership when he prefers a coalition of the willing (which doesn't require any talent to lead) to permanent allies, when he is exercising what can be seen as the power of a revisionist hegemon, of an unbridled sover-

eign power. To hell with the US Constitution and international law. Witness Abu Graib and Guantanamo. In fact, under Bush's 'leadership', it is increasingly clear that the US occupies the same place as Guantanamo; that is, the space of exception, of no-where land. Will this make the Bush administration exceptionally violent? Does Thaksin admire Bush's 'leadership' because he is swept away by the macho image of a gun-slinging lone cowboy wielding exceptional power?

In any case, Thaksin goes on to state, "It is my goal to prepare the best possible democratic path for the next government following new national elections this fall." Never mind the fact that there's no fall in Thailand. The interesting thing about this sentence is the attempt to hide the identity or specificity of "the next government"—by hiding a proper noun behind a common noun. It actually refers to a government formed by the Thai Rak Thai Party as will be evident below. This is strange because in the past 5-6 years the main trend has been the very opposite: the proliferation of the proper noun Thaksin and to a lesser extent that of the TRT. It is as if politics is Thaksinism, economics is Thaksinomics, and democracy is Thaksinocracy. And so on. It is always frightening when politics as a common noun turns into a proper noun. Recall Stalinism, Maoism, McCarthyism, etc. Whatever the case, the sentence is an attempt to make the political field appear more leveled (e.g., free and fair) than is actually the

case.

The second paragraph of the letter is where Thaksin's conception of the political is spelled out. And it's not a pretty sight. To grasp Bush's attention, Thaksin cries "wolf." Barbarians are at the gates: "There has been a threat to democracy in Thailand since early this year." This means that democracy has not been threatened until early this year. It has blossomed until recently—despite the fact that the executive power has been largely unbridled, checks and balances have been weakened, the workings of independent organizations have been interfered by the government, massive anti-defamation lawsuits have been filed against government critics, media figures who should have known better about the virtues of self-censorship have been silenced; extra-judicial killings have been carried out in the 'war on drugs', emergency power has been used in the South, etc. during the past 5-6 years. (I wonder if President Bush has filed massive anti-defamation lawsuits against his critics.) We can see that democracy has been vibrant in Thailand—until recently. But in Thaksin's world, "Key democratic institutions...have been repeatedly undermined by interests that depend on creating chaos and mounting street demonstrations in Bangkok as a means to acquire political power that they cannot gain through winning elections." Thaksin continues, "Having failed to provoke violence and disorder, my opponents are now attempting various extra-constitutional tactics to

co-opt the will of the people.”

A few things need to be highlighted here. One, the use of the word “opponents” is a gross understatement. Thaksin is really referring to enemies. Constituting a faceless threat to democracy that seeks to “provoke violence and disorder” and to foment “chaos” in the form of “street demonstrations” his opponents are really The Public Enemy. It can be assumed that they won’t be treated with agonistic respect as political adversaries, but will be dealt with as enemies. To imply that someone is the enemy is not simply descriptive; it is also normative and performative. Isn’t a democratic ethos about transforming antagonism into agonism, enemies into adversaries?

The facelessness and thereby namelessness of his opponents isn’t merely about being Politically Correct. It is a tactic to emphasize the magnitude of the threat from the deranged horde that Thaksin as the only individual appearing in the letter has to confront. Being amorphous the threat is everywhere; everyone is potentially a threat. Here we have a situation where only one pole—the sovereign pole—is individualized, while the other pole is simply composed of masses. So we can also perceive Thaksin’s two bodies here: as the Leviathan, Thaksin’s body is both his as well as the body politic. He is the guardian of democracy. His enemies are therefore the Enemy of the State.

Two, it doesn’t matter that the street demonstrations were largely nonviolent or that the right to organize nonviolent demonstrations is constitutionally guaranteed. For Thaksin, political power or democracy is simply about “winning elections.”

Here the emphasis is on *cracy*, which is the force of the greatest number, at the expense of *demos*. The idea is to get rid of the constitutive tension between the *demos* and the *cracy*. Small wonder that Thaksin likes to boast that he has millions of votes (19 million from the first national elections and 16 million from the second) in his hands. Put another way, Thaksin wants to limit the power of the people to the voting ballots, to, what Antonio Negri calls, “constituted power.” He fears “constituent power.” It is never right for “constituent power” to “co-opt the will of the people.” Thus the problem is not really with co-opting the will of the people. If Thaksin does it, it is called ‘populism.’ If the multitude does it, it is a threat. In sum, Thaksinian democracy, which can be seen as a ‘populist’ version of neoliberalism, is an unchanging given, a finalized form that shuns the excess of time. There is no place for what Sheldon Wolin calls “fugitive democracy” or what Jacques Derrida calls “democracy to come.” Democracy is inviolable as long as it goes the way Thaksin likes, as long as the TRT gets back in office. This seems to be what Thaksin intended in the closing sentence of the paragraph: “If our democratic institutions prove strong over the next several months, these [the “violence and disorder” unleashed by his “opponents”] will be unsuccessful.”

In the third paragraph, Thaksin’s (demo)cratic credentials are further rubbed in. The paragraph opens with: “On April 2nd, my Party, Thai Rak Thai, won a convincing majority in country-wide elections.” As if this statement is too modest, Thaksin then goes for the overkill: “Having led Thailand’s government for over

five years and won decisive victories in two previous national elections, I was confident of strong popular support and the voters confirmed that view.” Convincing majority. Decisive victories. Strong popular support. Dubya might have felt a bit turned off or out-manned reading these words for he has never enjoyed landslide victories before. The idea is to reemphasize the equation Thaksin+TRT+Elections = Democracy to Bush. Thaksin then goes on to blame the political deadlock confronting the kingdom on his opponents, now meaning oppositional political parties: “My political opponents, because they knew they would again lose, boycotted the April elections and left the political situation in Thailand in deadlock.” Of course, not mentioned is the fact that he dissolved Parliament at the moment when oppositional parties were attempting to grill him on his shady Temasek deal. At first he threw down the gauntlet. He was willing to allow the opposition to scrutinize his involvement in the multi-billion deal. This wouldn’t lead to a vote of no confidence in the premier because as the minority the opposition could not amass the necessary votes to make that motion. But then he chickened out, dissolved Parliament, and sent every MP packing. Also not mentioned is the whole farce pertaining to the choice of the election date and to the Election Commission. All these don’t matter.

A government spokesperson defended Thaksin’s one-sided account by insisting that the premier has every right to tell Bush his preferred version of the political situation. This seems to be an assertion of relativism. Or is it an expression of autism? It is

indeed terrifying when those who exercise sovereign power are relativistic. It suggests that anything goes or everything is possible. In other words, what happens may be terrifying but certainly not as frightening as what could have happened. Being sovereign after all is about being exceptional—about being roguish. The rogue that Thaksin is! Perhaps Thaksin has never heard of what Aristotle calls “phronesis.” Freedom of speech isn’t about the individual’s right to say whatever s/he wants. It’s about creating a space for the greatest possible views to be expressed (since no mortal can see from everywhere or can view from nowhere, and hence every view is limited) for the collective or public good. Here we are also seeing that Thaksin is asserting the right to say whatever he wants, but denying it to his ‘opponents’. Witness all the anti-defamation lawsuits he has filed against them.

The third paragraph ends with another patriotic heroism of Thaksin—his willingness to take a leave of absence “to restore calm so that preparations for the royal celebration [the 60th anniversary of H.M. the King’s accession to the throne, although Thaksin thought it was the king’s coronation] could proceed.” Had it not been for the royal celebrations, he wouldn’t have “stepped aside”? He would have opted for the breaking point? So the royal celebrations prevented him from imposing the Final Solution on his ‘opponents’, on the Enemy of the State? Would that be considered heroic? Or did Thaksin really face immense pressure to step aside—i.e., it wasn’t really a voluntary and heroic decision?

Many have already pointed out the problem with the asser-

tion in paragraph four that “Thai courts annulled the April elections on technical considerations.” The elections were deemed illegitimate rather than technically flawed. Thaksin then goes on to mention that the new round of national elections has been scheduled for October. He insists, “Most objective observers believe that my Party will again receive the people’s mandate to form a government.” Recall “the next government” mentioned in the first paragraph of the letter. Thaksin shuns from talking about winning a landslide victory here because he’ll probably won’t get one. He’ll be satisfied with a marginal victory—like the one Dubya won over Gore in his first presidential election. But even his ‘opponents’ think that he will win again. Does this make them among the “objective observers”? But they can’t be because they’re a deranged horde. So here Thaksin’s friend-enemy binary opposition is being destabilized.

In another heroic moment, Thaksin asserts: “In the meantime, I could not allow my country to drift without leadership.” And only he can provide that much needed leadership. He is the indispensable person or the savior. Never mind that hundreds of thousands had protested his leadership in the past few months and had pressured him to step down. Thaksin still has faith in (demo)cracy.

What good will his leadership bring? Thaksin explains, and the importance of this sentence cannot be overemphasized, thus: “Our on-going war on terror must be prosecuted, our economy must be managed, and the basic functions of government must be carried out.” Where is the government waging a war on terror? In the three southernmost prov-

inces? But the conflict in the deep South has never been presented as a war on terror, domestically at least. An on-going war on terror against his ‘opponents’ as they are the designated enemies of Thaksin’s (demo)cracy? Is the Thai government participating in the US-led war on terror in ways that are unbeknownst to the public? Is Thaksin saying that he’ll give the US more support in its war on/of terror (if Dubya seconds his war on terror at home)? Or is the “our ongoing war on terror” phrase simply there to capture Dubya’s attention since it is the first of the three reasons?

Next on the list is “our economy must be managed.” Thaksin probably meant maintaining a favorable business and investment climate and promoting economic growth. (Here the word “managed” is quite awkward as it sounds like a “managed economy”—definitely not something Dubya is going to support.) For months Thaksin has repeatedly raised the specter of a financial meltdown to his compatriots as the primary justification for reactivating his role as caretaker prime minister. Fear is being fanned that businesses will close down, foreign investors will flee, and millions will lose their jobs. Fear is individualizing as well as massifying in order to cultivate an apolitical and apathetic public. Panic rules. Thaksin subsequently argues that the main objective of the letter to Bush is primarily to inform the US president that Thailand still has a favorable investment climate. But in the letter this reason is awkwardly formulated and is secondary to waging the war on/of terror.

Last on the list is “the basic functions of government must be

carried out." This is really vague, and it can comprise almost everything—and hence nothing. Is Thaksin referring to 'routine' functions? But aren't these carried out by the bureaucracy? Given these three reasons, Thaksin says "I have heeded the calls of many Thais—both within my Party and among the opposition as well—to resume active role as caretaker Prime Minister." Thaksin "heeded the calls of many Thais" or was he really itching to come back—and to get back at his 'opponents'? This assertion however disrupts if not unravels Thaksin's thesis that democracy is under threat in Thailand. He's not facing a monolithic and demonic opposition as he seems to be portraying at the outset of—and throughout—the letter: some among the opposition even support him. It's possible after all to be an anti-Thaksin Thaksinian. Is an anti-Thaksin Thaksinian a friend or an enemy of Thaksin?

In the penultimate paragraph, Thaksin assures Bush that he "will take steps to help get the country ready for free and fair elections." Again, this reaffirms Thaksin's conviction that (demo)cracy is democracy. He loves plebiscitary democracy because it enables him to sidestep any form of public or parliamentary debate and deliberation. Thaksin then adds that he will work "to shift the national debate from one that is emotionally charged to one that reasonably discusses the central questions of Thailand's future, including whether the country's political future will be decided through the ballot box or in the street." On the one hand, this statement seeks to eliminate passion from politics. But politics is about passion. Love is very important for poli-

tics. Thaksin wants an arid post-political landscape where administration according to market values takes precedence over politics. He's repeatedly stressed the importance of "calm politics." This in itself is emotionally charged; it reflects his hatred of contingency and time, of change and difference. On the other hand, this assertion suggests that only constituted power is legitimate, and constituent power will never be. We can see this in the choice "the ballot box or the street." Why not the ballot box **and** the street? Thaksin continues, "The answer to that question, Mr. President, will have an important impact on the future course of democracy in Asia." This is definitely intended as a hyperbole. It's Thaksin's version of the post-Communist domino theory: the fall of democracy in Thailand to "demagoguery and mob action" will send the dominoes tumbling in Asia. Is Thaksin requesting Dubya's favor to prevent the dominoes from tumbling in Asia?

Thaksin ends his letter with the usual diplomatic courtesy: "Finally, Mr. President, please accept my enduring confidence that the relationship between Thailand and the United States, based on shared democratic values and vital national interests, will only grow in the months and years ahead." Shared democratic values. What are they? (Demo)cracy? Neoliberalism? Whereas the Bush administration is practicing a neoconservative version of neoliberalism, Thaksin has been experimenting with a populist neoliberalism. That (demo)cracy and neoliberalism "will only grow in the months and years ahead" is definitely a major setback to democratic politics in the 21st century.

Postscript

In an address to 78,540 officials from local administration bodies in the kingdom on 18 July 2006, Thaksin autistically reiterates the ideas expressed in the letter to Bush. With a straight face he insists, "What is happening in Thailand now is unbelievable to me, but there's nothing I can do." This is an unbelievable remark. With a stroke he not only exculpates himself from any responsibility for the present situation but also presents himself as the political victim of demonic forces beyond his control—forces which he will however try to valiantly overcome as the self-designated guardian of democracy. As such, Thaksin states, "Today, to be or not to be the prime minister is no longer important for me. But the country must be strong. I stand here because I want to safeguard democracy." He continues, "I won't allow democracy to be absent from this country, even for only 3 months." Of course, according to Thaksin, the only way to safeguard democracy is to hold elections. Thaksin goes on, "Difference is beautiful in a democracy. Everybody has his or her own rights. Don't be so self-absorbed. Everybody has to respect one another. Don't regard people outside your own group as enemies." No doubt, this ethos is present in his letter to Bush and during the past 5 years that Thaksin has been in office. It is also striking that at the time Thaksin was making this tongue-in-cheek statement, he also extended the emergency decree in the south for another three months. The emergency decree certainly doesn't cultivate an ethos of generosity as it justifies the exercise of lawless power and lawless law.

Soravis Jayanama, 24 July 2006

How Can We Stand by and Allow This to Go On?

They wrote the names of the dead children on their plastic shrouds. "Mehdi Hashem, aged seven—Qana," was written in felt pen on the bag in which the little boy's body lay. "Hussein al-Mohamed, aged 12—Qana," "Abbas al-Shalhoub, aged one—Qana." And when the Lebanese soldier went to pick up Abbas's little body, it bounced on his shoulder as the boy might have done on his father's shoulder on Saturday. In all, there were 56 corpses brought to the Tyre government hospital and other surgeries, and 34 of them were children. When they ran out of plastic bags, they wrapped the small corpses in carpets. Their hair was matted with dust, most had blood running from their noses. You must have a heart of stone not to feel the outrage that those of us watching this experienced yesterday. This slaughter was an obscenity, an atrocity—yes, if the Israeli air force truly bombs with the 'pinpoint accuracy' it claims, this was also a war crime. Israel claimed that missiles had been fired by Hizbollah gunmen from the south Lebanese town of Qana—as if that justified this massacre. Israel's Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, talked about "Muslim terror" threatening "western civilisation"—as if the Hizbollah had killed all these poor people.

And in Qana, of all places. For only 10 years ago, this was the scene of another Israeli massacre, the slaughter of 106 Lebanese refugees by an Israeli artillery battery as they sheltered in a UN base in the town. More than half of those 106 were children.

Israel later said it had no live-time pilotless photo-reconnaissance aircraft over the scene of that killing—a statement that turned out to be untrue when *The Independent* discovered videotape showing just such an aircraft over the burning camp. It is as if Qana—whose inhabitants claim that this was the village in which Jesus turned water into wine—has been damned by the world, doomed forever to receive tragedy.

And there was no doubt of the missile which killed all those children yesterday. It came from the United States, and upon a fragment of it was written: "For use on MK-84 Guided Bomb BSU-37-B". No doubt the manufacturers can call it "combat-proven" because it destroyed the entire three-storey house in which the Shalhoub and Hashim families lived. They had taken refuge in the basement from an enormous Israeli bombardment, and that is where most of them died. I found Nejwah Shalhoub lying in the government hospital in Tyre, her jaw and face bandaged like Robespierre's before his execution. She did not weep, nor did she scream, although the pain was written on her face. Her brother Taisir, who was 46, had been killed. So had her sister Najla. So had her little niece Zeinab, who was just six. "We were in the basement hiding when the bomb exploded at one o'clock in the morning," she said. "What in the name of God have we done to deserve this? So many of the dead are children, the old, women. Some of the children were still awake and playing.

Why does the world do this to us?" Yesterday's deaths brought to more than 500, the total civilian dead in Lebanon since Israel's air, sea and land bombardment of the country begun on 12 July after Hizbollah members crossed the frontier wire, killed three Israeli soldiers and captured two others. But yesterday's slaughter ended more than a year of mutual antagonism within the Lebanese government as pro-American and pro-Syrian politicians denounced what they described as "an ugly crime". Thousands of protesters attacked the largest United Nations building in Beirut, screaming: "Destroy Tel Aviv, destroy Tel Aviv," and Lebanon's Prime Minister, the normally unflappable Fouad Siniora, called US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and ordered her to cancel her imminent peace-making trip to Beirut. No one in this country can forget how President George Bush, Ms Rice, and Tony Blair have repeatedly refused to call for an immediate ceasefire—a truce that would have saved all those lives yesterday. Ms Rice would say only: "We want a ceasefire as soon as possible," a remark followed by an Israeli announcement that it intended to maintain its bombardment of Lebanon for at least another two weeks.

Throughout the day, Qana villagers and civil defence workers dug through the ruins of the building with spades and with their hands, tearing at the muck until they found one body after another still dressed in colourful clothes. In one section of the

rubble, they found what was left of a single room with 18 bodies inside. Twelve of the dead were women. All across southern Lebanon now, you find scenes like this, not so grotesque in scale, perhaps, but just as terrible, for the people of these villages are terrified to leave and terrified to stay. The Israelis had dropped leaflets over Qana, ordering its people to leave their homes. Yet twice now since Israel's onslaught began, the Israelis have ordered villagers to leave their houses and then attacked them with aircraft as they obeyed the Israeli instructions and fled. There are at least 3,000 Shia Muslims trapped in villages between Qlaya and Aiteroun—close to the scene of Israel's last military incursion at Bint Jbeil—and yet none of them can leave without fear of dying on the roads.

And Mr Olmert's reaction? After expressing his "great sorrow", he announced that: "We will not stop this battle, despite the difficult incidents [sic] this morning. We will continue the activity, and if necessary it will be broadened without hesitation." But how much further can it be broadened? Lebanon's infrastructure is being steadily torn to pieces, its villages razed, its people more and more terrorised—and terror

is the word they used—by Israel's American-made fighter bombers. Hizbollah's missiles are Iranian-made, and it was Hizbollah that started this war with its illegal and provocative raid across the border. But Israel's savagery against the civilian population has deeply shocked not only the Western diplomats who have remained in Beirut, but hundreds of humanitarian workers from the Red Cross and major aid agencies.

Incredibly, Israel yesterday denied safe passage to a UN World Food Programme aid convoy en route to the south, a six-truck mission that should have taken relief supplies to the south-eastern town of Marjayoun. More than three quarters of a million Lebanese have now fled their homes, but there is still no accurate figure for the total number still trapped in the south. Khalil Shalhoub, who survived amid the wreckage in Qana yesterday, said that his family and the Hashims were just too "terrified" to take the road out of the village, which has been attacked by aircraft for more than two weeks. The seven-mile highway between Qana and Tyre is littered with civilian homes in ruins and burnt-out family cars. On Thursday, the Israeli Army's Al-Mashriq radio,

which broadcasts into southern Lebanon, told residents that their villages would be "totally destroyed" if missiles were fired from them. But anyone who has watched Israel's bombing these past two weeks knows that, in many cases, the Israelis do not know the location in which the Hizbollah are firing missiles, and—when they do—they frequently miss their targets. How can a villager prevent the Hizbollah from firing rockets from his street? The Hizbollah do take cover beside civilian houses—just as Israeli troops entering Bint Jbeil last week also used civilian homes for cover. But can this be the excuse for slaughter on such a scale? Mr Siniora addressed foreign diplomats in Beirut yesterday, telling them that the government in Beirut was now only demanding an immediate ceasefire and was not interested any longer in a political package to go with it. Needless to say, Mr Jeffrey Feltman, whose country made the bomb which killed the innocents of Qana yesterday, chose not to attend.

*Robert Fisk,
The Independent,
August 1, 2006*

Lese Majesty

Part I

Has the time come for the lese majesty law in Thailand to be reconsidered? The question is worth asking, especially in times of political turmoil like this that inevitably spawn a spate of lese majesty accusations. The ques-

tion is particularly timely given the gist of the King's annual speech last December, and germane given the indisputably progressive nature of the King's reminder that the "last resort" for a democratic, constitutional monarchy is the courts. The question deserves a thoughtful and serious

response.

Like many laws, the Thai lese majesty law, as written, may have outlived its original purpose and its use has simply devolved into insensibility. Rather than protecting the prestige of the monarchy, the invoking of the lese majesty law has become a

tawdry and naked attempt to use the institution to suppress views that one side or another does not like.

The lese majesty law, as it now stands, is anachronistic. The punishment has steadily climbed throughout the twentieth century; its last infusion made by the odious coup d'état government following the bloody suppression of 6 October 1976, which increased the punishment to a minimum of three and a maximum of 15 year's imprisonment. Many such coup orders made by dictators have been brought forward for amendment or revocation. This remnant of dictatorship, unfortunately, has not enjoyed the same fate. Who dares even suggest that it be revised or abolished without fear of being charged with lese majesty? What politician dare enter the legal morass of voting for such a measure?

Adjudication of defamation cases is tricky enough as it is. Defamation cases don't involve "evidence" and "facts" in a normal way. Separating the line between fact and metaphor, assessing intention and the impact of words—and assessing criminality from such—is not something police, prosecutors, or courts are well trained in. In Thailand in the last decade or so, the number of defamation cases has tripled. It has become standard practice for those in power to respond to criticism with a defamation charge.

Lese majesty cases are many times worse. The accusation of the lese majesty laws sets in motion an inexorable mechanism that compels the police to make charges, prosecutors to prosecute, and courts to hand down decisions. These parties failing to act can lead to the lese majesty

charge being leveled at them. Because of the complex role the monarchy plays in society, and because many Thais have become trigger-happy in making the charge, what constitutes normal debate in other constitutional monarchies is increasingly difficult in Thai society.

Somehow Thai society has dead-ended itself, unable to go forward or back, unable to even address the extremely problematic nature of this law. Thai society has narrowed its options, leaving a single ineluctable logic of suppression: The law protects the monarchy. Anyone who questions the law must not care about protecting the monarchy. Such a person must be disloyal to the monarchy, and must be suppressed.

But there are other options out there, and here a bit of comparison makes sense. Japan's abolition of the lese majesty law after World War II resulted in no harm to the institution. A certain amount of debate about various aspects of the monarchy has emerged. But it is always polite.

The Norwegian constitution, promulgated in the early nineteenth century, holds that the "King's person is sacred; he cannot be censured or accused." The Thai 1997 Constitution says that the "King shall be enthroned in a position of revered worship and shall not be violated. No person shall expose the King to any sort of accusation or action." Defaming the King of Norway is a criminal offense, like in Thailand, with a maximum of five year's imprisonment. But when was the last lese majesty case in Norway? Or in Great Britain? Or even in Nepal? Does this mean that Norwegians don't "love" their king as much? Does it mean that the monarchy in Great Britain

doesn't have its detractors like www.abolishthemonarchy.co.uk? No, obviously it doesn't. But the rationale for such British republicans is not defamatory to the Queen herself. In the meantime, most British surveyed want to keep their monarchy. Democracy thrives. All is good.

So with similar laws, why has the interpretation of such measures in Thailand become so insensible, as it appeared to the great legal scholar Jitti Tingsapat in the 1980s? Why did a personal secretary of the King himself predict about the same time that use of the lese majesty law would decrease until it was finally abolished? In other words, at a period when, through the sacrifice of many, democracy has made great strides in Thailand, why does this mischievous law continue to be evoked?

One need only look at the interview of Sulak Sivaraksa that caused the editor, Thanapol Eawsakul, to be charged recently with lese majesty. From a "normal" perspective, Sulak is suggesting in the interview that all institutions be held accountable, including the monarchy—a normal condition of democratic governance. What's defamatory to the King himself in that? Where has this hyper-sensitivity to any reference to the monarchy at all become the norm? What's the way out?

Part II

Part I of this article discussed how the use of the lese majesty law has become increasingly problematic in Thailand, despite a general movement toward more democracy. Various parties can accuse others of lese majesty with impunity. Some

interpret the law to mean that there should be no reference to the monarchy at all. Some interpret it to mean that there should be no discussion about what constitutional monarchy should mean.

Whatever the case, there seem to be no real guidelines in place to help guide the police, prosecutors, or courts in determining a possible violation or how to adjudicate a case. Meanwhile, everyone seems to understand that the law tends to be used as a political tool in silencing various groups or individuals in society.

There are other possibilities. The law could be abolished, leaving the King to use the regular defamation law to defend his own reputation. But for many, the idea of the King being involved in a normal defamation court case appears unseemly. There could be a forum for police, prosecutors, and courts that lays out some sort of framework or criteria concerning evidence, arrest, prosecution, and adjudication. But there is little to direct them. Another option is for all parties to simply show restraint. Citizens are slow to make the accusation. Police are hesitant to make the charge and arrest. Prosecutors begin to show greater discrimination in accepting lese majesty cases. Courts begin to give greater leeway in the name of freedom of expression. But this would only work if everyone in Thai society agreed to practice greater restraint. Much of the convoluted logic and the peculiar mechanisms engaged by the accusation make this option difficult.

Are there any other options?

Fortunately, the King has provided part of the answer himself. His December speech of

last year is instructive. Most observers interpreted the King's words to mean that the use of the lese majesty law was troubling to him. Speaking to his subjects, the King said that people saying that "the King can do no wrong is very much an insult to the King, because why can the King do no wrong, why can not the King do wrong, because this shows that they regard that the King is not human." The King further reasons: "Suppose if I speak wrongly, because I am not aware, that is another case, but do wrong without realizing, and realizing that it is wrong. It is not good to do wrong with full awareness but sometimes you do not realize, you must apologize. If you speak without awareness, lack of awareness is not careful, afterwards you will regret."

The King points out that the accusation of lese majesty impacts the monarchy directly. Talking to Thai society as a whole, the King says, "If you rule out all criticism as a violation, the damage is done to the King." The King goes on to indicate that when people are jailed for lese majesty, he is "in trouble" and has to pardon them.

The King's position seems clear. Use of the lese majesty law hurts the person of the King and the monarchy as an institution. Reasonable discussion and normal criticism should be allowed.

It is difficult to fathom exactly how anyone could make the charge of lese majesty after the King made his position this clear. And yet the accusations fly. In the present political environment, there are those who would attempt to make even a reasonable discussion of the issue—such as laid out in this article—a case of lese majesty. When will this all end?

Lese majesty, as it manifests itself in Thai political society, represents a serious threat to the freedom of expression as guaranteed in Section 39 of the constitution. It inevitably becomes a political tool aimed at suppression of criticism. As the King suggests, it also tarnishes the reputation of the monarchy when unscrupulous parties—or maybe even anyone—decide to level the charge. And yet even to talk about lese majesty impugns the patriotism of the speaker. How can this measure, fortified in the days of dictatorship, be reined in?

A rather simple solution suggests itself. Within Sections 101 and 102 of the Norwegian law code is the standard lese majesty formula: "Any person who defames the King or the Regent shall be liable to detention or imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years." But section 103 adds the intriguing sentence: "Prosecution of any defamation pursuant to sections 101 and 102 shall be initiated only by order of the King or with his consent."

If abolition of the lese majesty law in Thailand seems unimaginable; if the police and prosecutors feel compelled to pursue charges; if Thai society itself cannot show restraint in making the charge despite the apparent displeasure of the King, then maybe the addition of this single clause may set things right.

The King has done three remarkable things since last December. He has come out as an advocate for freedom of expression in Thailand by opposing use of the lese majesty law. He has invited criticism. And while others called for the King to intervene and fix the political im-

passee, the King instead pointed out that a more democratic option is available: the courts. What a marvelous addition to the King's legacy.

With the worldwide attention on the King as the longest reigning monarch, what a wonderful gift it would be for Thai society to give him or the Privy

Council the discretion to take the appropriate measures needed to defend the reputation of the monarchy. Amend Section 112 of the Thai penal code by adding the clause that makes the use of the lese majesty possible "only by order of the King or with his consent."

Otherwise, the lese majesty

law in Thailand will ever be ready at hand to serve as a weapon in the political arena, always to a detriment to the institution the law intends to protect.

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Sulak wins legal battle against PTT

The Criminal Court yesterday acquitted respected scholar Sulak Sivaraksa, who was charged by PTT Plc for his role in a protest against the construction of a Thai-Burmese gas pipeline project in Kanchanaburi province eight years ago.

PTT had charged Mr Sulak with violating the Petroleum Authority of Thailand Act of BE 2521, saying he and 30 other people had staged a sit-in protest which obstructed the pipeline construction in tambon Huay Khayeng, Thong Pha Phum district, between March 2-6, 1998.

Mr Sulak told the court that the protest rally was staged because he and his group believed that the pipeline project posed a grave threat to the ecological system and wildlife, including endangered species, that lived in the



Sulak: Sued for role in gas pipeline protest

rich forest in Thong Pha Phum district. Also, he said there was no public hearing before the project was implemented.

He also argued that the Petroleum Authority of Thailand Act cited by the agency, then called the Petroleum Authority of Thailand, in proceeding with the legal case against him was invalid. The act had been nullified and replaced by two royal decrees that resulted in the privatisation of the agency, which subsequently became PTT Plc,

Mr Sulak said.

Also, the decrees contained no clause that specified penalties against protesters who obstructed or prevented authorities from doing their work. Since they invalidated and replaced the act on Oct 1, 2001, the defendant's alleged offence automatically became null and void, he said.

The Criminal Court agreed with Mr Sulak's reasoning, saying that the two decrees empowered PTT staff to expropriate land in order to carry out the pipeline project but, unlike the nullified act, did not specify any penalty against protesters.

The prosecutor representing PTT Plc said the agency would appeal.

Bangkok Post
August 19, 2006

Letter from Secretariat Office

Dear INEB members and readers,

From May to July, the INEB secretariat office was very busy with exciting activities. As usual, we had our annual Youth Buddhist Leadership Training for Spiritual Resurgence and Social Innovation for 6 weeks. This time we had almost 30 young people from different parts of Asia, as far as Bhutan, Tibet and Ladakh, together with the neighboring countries of Siam. We are happy to learn that many alumni are active in their communities. In this issue we have some of their reports.

Even though the secretariat office invested its effort to strengthen friendship among socially engaged Buddhists and to support their work, inter-religious issues always interest us. In the past, we heard stories of conflicts and violence among religious communities in Southeast Asia. Now the fire is burning in our home country.

To respond to the situations including, but not exclusively, the unrest in the southern provinces of Siam, INEB was given warm cooperation from the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) to open the second regional dialogue among Buddhists and Muslims after the first one in 1996. In the last week of June we were honored to receive the special guests, Dr Chandra Muzaffar and other Muslim scholars in Southeast Asia. In the following pages, we include a special keynote address of the Ven. Paisan Visalo delivered in the conference, and Dr Muzaffar's presentations.

Aside from the regional dialogue, we also cooperated in the local inter-religious program. We firmly believe that the Buddha's teachings and life example are a sound foundation for us to create interreligious peace. Then the experimental training program was held in early July. It aimed to speak to Buddhists to cultivate compassion and wisdom so as to understand and respect fellow human beings regardless of their religion. It turned out to be satisfactory. We hope to expand it to be a regional training in the future.

From all the three activities, if any merit is incurred, it would be our offering, a token of gratitude to our great teacher, the late Ven Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. He devoted himself to fostering understanding and cooperation among religions in pulling the world away from materialism and consumerism, which earned him UNESCO's recognition for his centenary this year.

Once again, this time of the year is the *vassa* or rain retreat for ordained Buddhists. We would like to express our moral support to all the venerables. The laypeople, too, should take these three months to advance our spiritual practice. The balance between social engagement and inner peace cultivation is always an issue for many of us.

This is the last issue of the year 2006. Please don't forget to renew your membership so that we can communicate to you about our activities in the future. You can also help by sharing your ideas, comments and stories of your social engagement to inspire other readers as well.

Yours in the Dhamma,
Anne Lapapan Supamanta
Executive Secretary

P.S. Suggested minimum subscription is US\$ 50, but if you can pay more it will help us a great deal. But if you cannot afford it, we will send *Seeds of Peace* to you anyway.

The Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia: Working towards Justice and Peace

The recent pages of Southeast Asian history record the rising conflicts and distrust among Buddhist and Muslim communities. So far there has been little effort to understand these conflicts from a regional perspective. The only Buddhist Muslim dialogue that we were involved in was on the theme 'Alternative Politics for Asia' in 1996 which brought together Malaysian and Thai intellectuals. The dialogue, held in Penang, Malaysia, by International Movement for a Just World (JUST) and Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPD), resulted in a book of the same name which was well received by both Buddhists and Muslims

and people of other faiths.

The effort was revived again during 26-28 June when Sulak Sivaraksa and Dr Chandra Muzaffar (JUST) led the regional dialogue in Bangkok. The participants were leading intellectuals, social activists and grassroots religious leaders from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, with some observers from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos and Japan.

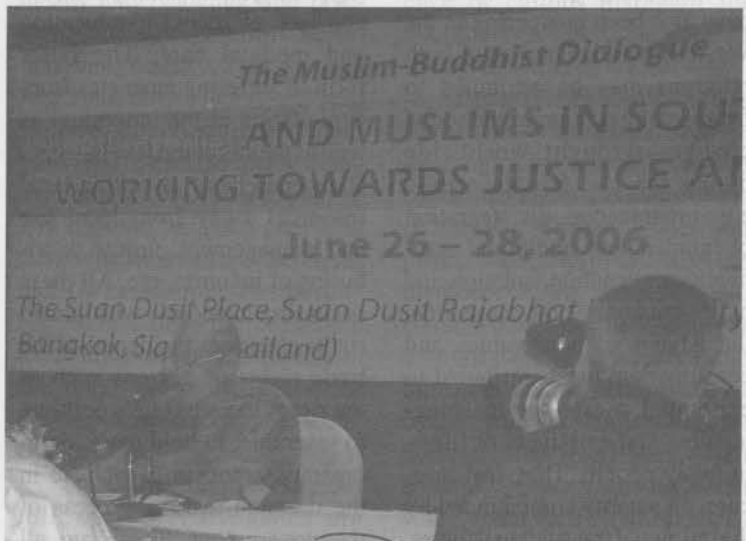
The dialogue began with the prayer by Nitti Hassan, the president of the Council of Muslim Organizations of Thailand, and chanting by the Venerable Chai Varadhammo. The Venerable Paisan Visalo, a key figure in

peacemaking, delivered a special keynote address, followed by presentations from Dr Chandra Muzaffar and Sulak Sivaraksa.

The participants were divided into small groups in the following sessions. They discussed the principles of Islam and Buddhism that relate to justice and peace, as well as concrete current issues. One group focused on the situation in the south of Thailand. At the end of the dialogue the participants came up with a guideline for action and the Dusit Declaration. A committee was formed to carry out the action plan, with representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

On the Path toward Peace and Justice: Challenges Confronting Buddhists and Muslims

It had long been a conviction among Western intellectuals and academics that religions would disappear from the world in the 20th century due to the advent and hegemony of Reason and Science. Although time has proven the inaccuracy of this prediction, this creed was still prevalent even in mid-20th century. Many leading sociologists at the time continued to assert that by the 21st century, religions would fade away. Four decades ago, one well-known anthropologist specializing in religions even asserted thus:



"...the evolutionary future of religion is extinction. ...(A)s a cultural trait, belief in supernatural powers is doomed to die out, all over the world, as a result of the increasing adequacy and diffusion of scientific knowledge...(T)he process is inevitable."

Nowadays, however, no serious Western thinker or academic entertains the idea of the End of Religion. It has been clear to almost everyone that religions have regained their influences in every part of the world during the past 25 years. They have played crucial roles not only in the daily life of their adherents but also in politics and public life. In several countries, religion helped trigger political changes and even regime change. Books on religion have become international bestsellers. And religious symbols or icons have been valorized by the market; some have even been used to add value to products. Needless to say, public campaigns that pick up enormous financial contributions are oriented toward religious issues.

Similar to other religions Buddhism and Islam have not only revived and thrived in countries that long upheld them, but have also been prospering in the Western world. The rise of both religions may be attributed to far-reaching economic and social changes wrought worldwide during the last few decades—e.g., urbanization, disintegration of families and traditional communities, alienation, isolation, and hyper-tension. At the same time, the advent of new values and consumerism has contributed to existential angst—the meaninglessness and emptiness of life—in many people. They feel insecure, an anxiety compounded by the inflows of transnational forces,

especially from the West, which are perceived as undermining local identities and cultures. All these are factors that have induced a vast number of people to turn to religion, to hold on to religion as the anchor or pillar of their lives in a time filled with uncertainties.

Religion and Social Healing

No one would doubt the role of religion in social healing. Religion may serve as an important pillar to help 'stabilize' life. It has given a sense of direction to many people's lives. It has made them confident in their identities, and has given them security and a modicum of happiness amidst troubling and complex social currents. As such, religion has helped alleviate the mental sufferings of a great number of people in a way modern institutions will never be able to do.

However, the role of religion should not be limited to only pacifying the troubled minds of its followers. This is especially true in the present context where there are great sufferings in society. They are not simply a matter of existential anxiety and loneliness, but also result from grinding poverty, material deprivation, and lack of access to education and medical care. The latter form of suffering emanates from exploitation at the individual as well as the structural levels—e.g., cheapened labor, diverting local resources away from local use and management, unjust distribution of incomes, etc. All these occur simultaneously with human rights abuses or the denial of the basic rights of citizens such as the rights to voice one's opinion, to assemble, to hold mass demonstration, and to participate in the decision-making process of the government. These are all

vital rights that help improve the people's quality of life.

Now this situation is happening amidst the widening gap between the rich and the poor, a huge gap that is completely unprecedented. It is occurring in a time when a minority possesses and controls massive wealth on a scale that is unheard of. This is a form of injustice that is readily apparent. And it may be interpreted as a form of violence too because it condemns millions to lives that are short, nasty, and brutish, resulting from poverty, hunger, and easily preventable diseases. At the same time, this injustice has bred mass demonstrations, which often ended in bloodshed. State officials had tortured or massacred demonstrators, for instance. As long as this injustice persists, the victims will eventually take up arms as their last resort. This has been the case in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Thailand to cite a few random examples.

Injustice and violence constitute the reality facing Buddhists and Muslims in many countries in Asia. And it cannot be denied that this reality contradicts the basic principles of both Buddhism and Islam. Both religions were created to enable people to live together peacefully and compassionately. Both respect the sacredness of life and the great potentialities of every life. It is clear that both religions did not teach their followers to single-mindedly pursue personal happiness. Rather they insist that happiness at the individual level is inextricable from happiness at the social level; that is, the happiness of others must also be cultivated, and here 'the others' refers not only to one's family members, friends, or neighbors, but to everyone in society and in the

world. Therefore, the elimination of injustice and violence in order to nurture peace and justice in society (and in the world) is a duty that Buddhists and Muslims cannot renounce.

Dual Obligations

In order to cultivate social justice and peace, religious people have two dual tasks, which I will call "external obligation" and "internal obligation."

External obligation means pushing for social change. In other words, it does not simply refer to interpersonal activities. Rather, it also includes political activities. Justice and peace will not emerge if a helping hand is lent only at the interpersonal level; for instance, in the form of material donations or taking care of the sick and needy. Put differently, structures that contribute to social injustices and violence must also be amended or transformed. For example, power should be decentralized to enable the people to make decisions on matters that directly impact their lives and to make the political system more democratic, transparent, and accountable. At the same time, there should be actions for what is known as redistributive justice—the just distribution of incomes, land reforms as well as progressive taxation. These will help dismantle structural violence and foster justice and peace.

Religious people tend to perceive social problems as simply emanating from personal flaws. Politicians are corrupt. Villagers are lazy or addicted to gambling, thus they are poor. Hence, they only seek to redress problems at the personal level. They demand for good and honest leaders. They lecture villagers on the virtue of diligence and the sin of

gambling. They only tend to provide assistance to individuals. These are necessary but insufficient undertakings. They should also focus on the structural level. This does not merely entail legislating laws to counter corruption and to oppose ruinous activities (e.g., leading to the squandering of wealth) because the causes of social suffering are much more than corruption and ruinous activities. New laws alone will not be able to contribute to changes if there are no parallel and complementary changes in other systemic elements or institutions.

To be able to do so, religious people must understand structural problems. They are complex and are interrelated to various other dimensions such as politics, economics, society, culture, and so on. The same approach that can be used to solve familial or community problems, which largely focuses on the individual level, should not be used to tackle social problems; one will not be able to correctly grasp social problems and propose viable solutions if one does so.

As for internal obligation, it means understanding and practicing one's religion in order to fathom its essence. This is a very important duty since it will lead to profound personal transformations and facilitate one's being *with* others. The failure to do so will trap the religious people in the formalities or superficialities of his or her religion. The narrowness of this view may contribute to a kind of fundamentalism and may obstruct both personal development and desirable social changes.

Not infrequently, religious followers or movements are only interested in matters or only

demand for things that benefit their respective religions—for instance, the demand to have a specific ministry to oversee their religion. In this context, a religious group or movement has become like an interest group—similar to a business association or a chamber of commerce. This is lamentable as religion should be concerned about universal values, about benefiting humanity regardless of differences.

Transcending Religious Barriers or Demarcations

Both Buddhism and Islam recognize the unity of humanity, seeing every human being as a friend or a fellow sharing the earth. Understanding the essence of one's religion will enable both the Buddhist and the Muslim people to appreciate this bond and to have compassion for one another. Differences in terms of religion, language, and nationality will not pose as barriers. However, quite a number of Buddhist and Muslim people divide and classify other human beings in terms of religion, race, nationality, language, etc. This has not only led to division between "us" and "them" but also to indifference or callous disregard for the others—even to the point of seeing the other as the enemy.

This view negatively impacts social justice and peace because the religious people will only be concerned about members of his or her own religion; justice and peace will apply to only the members of the same religion. He or she will not care about (or will not be able to perceive) the injustices and violence suffered by the members of other religious communities. Last year, Thai Buddhists experienced revulsion when some monks and novices were murdered in a temple in

Pattani province. A section of the temple was burned down, and the Buddha image was destroyed. Many expressed vengeance against the perpetrators of the crime. However, they felt no remorse when approximately 80 Muslim demonstrators suffocated to death after they were arrested and piled in army trucks during being transported to a military camp in that very same province.

It seems that many Muslims also share the same view as the aforementioned Buddhists. During a meeting of the National Reconciliation Commission, I suggested to my Muslim colleagues that they should publicly condemn the murder of the Buddhist monks in the case mentioned above, a tragedy that is believed to be perpetrated by a number of Muslims. But my Muslim colleagues declined to do so, fearing that it would make them the target of criticism or negative reaction from the local Muslim inhabitants.

As I've already said, a religious people tends to overlook the crime or injustice committed by the member of his or her own religious community. On the contrary, he or she will clearly see a crime or an injustice when it is perpetrated by a member of a different religious community. When a monk who was my friend was savagely stabbed to death in the northern part of Thailand, there was no moral outrage among Thai Buddhists in the kingdom. In fact, the murder received scant attention. One of the reasons for this is that the murderer appears to be a Buddhist. But there was moral outrage when Buddhist monks were killed by Muslims in the South of Thailand. Likewise, I learned that when Sunni Muslims bombed a

Shia mosque in Iraq during the Ramadan period last year (and there have been several more bombings), there was virtually no denunciation of the crime among Sunni Muslims worldwide (including Thailand). But there would be an endless round of moral outrage among Muslims whenever Muslim inhabitants in Iraq (whether Sunni or Shia) were killed by American soldiers.

I believe that any Buddhist or Muslim people who knows the essence of his or her religion will not be able to remain unperturbed whenever a fellow human being (and it does not matter which religion s/he is from, or if s/he has a religion for that matter) is abused in such manner. This is because religion is supposed to enable human beings to transcend the various barriers that have been artificially constructed by humans themselves. Religion opens us to the fact that we are human beings before we are Muslim, Buddhist, Thai, Malaysian, Indonesian, Sinhalese, Tamil, etc.

Religion can be a force for justice and peace because it profoundly transforms human beings enabling them to have compassion and generosity toward all humans. Identities (or *brands*) in terms of nationality, race, religion, ideology, etc. will not be able to sever the ties of humanity. But when we are unable to grasp the essence of our respective religions—when we are trapped in the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of our respective religions—then religion may turn into a major obstacle to justice and peace.

It cannot be denied that at present almost every religion in the world, including Buddhism and Islam, is being used to fan the hatred of others or to justify violence in the name of God or

other Absolute Values. We can see this in communal violence in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Middle East, Northern Ireland, etc. It is interesting to note that religious people who have picked up arms to fight one another feel that they are genuinely upholding the teachings of their respective religions.

There must be a very strong inspiration for a person to voluntarily sacrifice his or her life. For many people in the world, religion serves as this inspiration. The depressing thing is that nowadays religion is able to incite people to willingly die in order to kill others but seems to lack the power to inspire them to sacrifice their lives so that others may live.

Religion should be a force for peace. But this aspect of religion is waning. When millions worldwide demonstrated against the planned American invasion of Iraq in 2003, religious organizations did not constitute the majority in the antiwar movement.

When Israeli troops besieged Ramallah in Palestine in 2002, many innocent civilians were killed. Subsequently, many international activists went to Ramallah to serve as a human shield against Israeli troops and tanks. They were willing to risk their lives. Most of them however did not belong to any religious denomination.

Of course there are religious people who are working for peace. However, one of their preferred activities is holding peace conferences. On the contrary, the religious people who worship violence are willing to die in order to take the lives of others.

At present, a question that

is worth pondering is to what extent Buddhism or Islam is able to serve as a powerful inspiration for its followers to sacrifice their lives to save the lives of others. Or at least to convince followers to struggle for global justice and peace through nonviolence without being anxious for their own personal safety. This will be possible when there is no "us" versus "them".

I feel that this is one of the major challenges confronting Buddhists and Muslims who believe in justice and peace.

Transcending Religious Bigotry

Reaching the essence of religion liberates one not only from the delusion of identities that divide human beings but also from the narcissistic attachment to one's religion or sect; that is, seeing one's religion or sect as perfect and superior to all others. This delusion has been the cause of countless violence and tragedies in the past. Buddhism itself had fallen prey to this delusion. When Japan invaded China, Manchuria, and Korea 70 years ago Japanese Buddhist leaders extolled the invasion, even praising it as "sacred war inspired by the great compassion of the Bodhi-sattava". They felt that Buddhism in China and Korea was deformed and lowly, and that the one in Japan was authentic. It was thus the obligation of Japan to bring authentic Buddhism to China and Korea—and to India. This might ultimately entail "transforming the world into the pure Buddhist land".

Other religions had committed similar tragedies. Attachment to one's religion extinguishes compassion for other religions, leading to actions or practices

that are contrary to religious teachings and that destroy rather than nurture religion.

This is a lesson for both Buddhists and Muslims. And it challenges them to think of ways to prevent such tragedy from resurfacing in the future.

Collective Action against Violence

Buddhists and Muslims should not only be compassionate and open-minded, and thus not take part in violence perpetrated in the name of religion, but they should also help prevent violence from being unleashed in the name of religion. We must not forget that whenever thousands or tens of thousand are killed in a land where a religion has deeply planted its roots, it can be seen that that religion is a failure. This is because all religions reject violence and nurture compassion. It is already worrisome whenever a religion is not able to prevent the outbreak of violence because it shows that it lacks the power of peacebuilding. It is far worse whenever a religion directly incites violence for it points to its moral degeneration or disintegration.

Seen in this light, Buddhists and Muslims bear responsibility for the state of violence in many countries in the present, including Thailand. They have not only been unable to prevent or mitigate violent situations but have at times also allowed violence to be committed in the name of religion (even if the actual perpetrators constitute a minority).

Perhaps most religious leaders and people do not support and believe in violence. But their passivity or inaction enables the few who worship violence to hijack religion, to use religion to legitimize violence at will. This is

a major problem confronting religions worldwide and is a condition of violence in many areas of the world.

Therefore, it is highly pertinent for Buddhists and Muslims to put an end to violence done in the name of religion. At least, they should collaborate and condemn the killing of people or of members of different faiths without fearing retaliation by armed extremists or fundamentalists. At the same time, they should cooperate with one another to protect religion and religious places—along with the personal security of religious leaders, monks, etc. They should also work together demanding religious people to strictly uphold compassion and forbearance according to religious teachings, to advocate fraternity and the sacredness of life, and to refrain from violence in solving a problem or dispute.

Of course, this proposal may be against the grain of mainstream currents, which goes by the dictum "an eye for an eye." It requires a lot of moral courage as well as perseverance to be able to fulfill this task. As such, we must try to go to the heart or the highest ideals of religion. Being at one with the highest ideals will nurture us and enable us to persist steadily on our course despite the gravity of opposition.

Learning from Each Other

The last point I'd like to make is that bridges must be constructed between religions, between the followers of different religions. Working together to denounce violence committed in the name of religion may serve as an important stepping stone for more extensive and intricate collaboration in the future. On the one hand, Buddhists and Mus-

lims should collaborate to bring about positive social changes along the lines of justice and peace. We shouldn't forget that violence isn't simply about bloodshed. It also includes exploitation and the deprivation of basic necessities and the lack of access to education and public health. Here cooperation between Buddhists and Muslims is still weak because they are too fixated on the gains and interests of their respective communities.

Aside from cooperation in terms of justice and peace, working together on other public issues, including increasing daily contacts or interactions, is also essential because it helps bridge both religions together and helps reduce any misunderstanding, which may be a source of hostility, between them. Due to limited contacts or interactions, religious people of different religions learn about one another largely through the mass media or even the grapevine. As such, things may be distorted or added, contributing to misunderstanding.

Increased interactions between people of different religions may be facilitated by regular meetings or by collective activities such as trips to important religious sites, celebrations of religious days, cultural exchanges (e.g., the arts and music), social work, and even organizing sports events—keeping in mind the traditions and practices of participating religious communities in mind.

More challenging, however, is the willingness to learn from and about one another, particularly concerning religious teachings, beliefs, and practices. As a Buddhist, I think we can learn a lot from Muslim people, especially about cultivating a sense of justice and developing strong communities through religion; that is, binding 'worldly' and religious communities together. At the same time I feel that Muslims can also benefit from Buddhism. They may find Buddhist teachings on compassion, tolerance, interdependence of all sentient beings, and the Dependent

Origination useful.

Through open and continuous dialogues, I believe there will be improved understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. We will find that a lot of the differences between us have been exaggerated by a great magnitude, and that the differences between us serve as no legitimate reason to divide us into "us" and "them".

The road to justice and peace will be blocked as long as we cannot see through "the brands" that we and others 'wear', as long as we cannot appreciate the human ties that closely link us all together. Therefore, we should all treat each other as brothers and sisters. Wouldn't this enable us to make our religious duties, which are geared toward the highest ideals, more complete?

Phra Paisan Visalo

delivered at the Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue "Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia: Working towards Justice and Peace", 26-28 June 2006 at Suan Dusit Place Hotel, Bangkok.

Muslims and Buddhists in Asia

The Muslim and Buddhist dialogue is a peculiar process. That we are able to sustain this dialogue over 10 years at different time and places seems to be an achievement. It is our hope that the dialogue would result in a concrete proposal that would communicate to the powers that be the concern of civil societies in Southeast Asia, as well as the atmosphere that promote understanding between the two religious communities.

Ancient records of harmony

Since Muslims and Buddhists constitute the overwhelming majority of Asia's population, it is our burden to try to address the challenges encountering the two religions. There can't be peace in Asia without peace between the two.

In general, since ancient time, we see that the two communities have kept amiable relationship. Muslims came into contact with Buddhists around the late 7th century in regions including Eastern Persia, Af-

ghanistan, India, China, etc. Despite the Muslim military conquest at the initial stage, there is plenty of evidence showing the positive interactions between Muslim Sufis and Buddhists. The harmonious atmosphere was partly created by the appreciation of Buddhist teachings that the Muslim scholars encountered and on which they wrote. One such account came from Ibn-a-Nadim (died 995) who praised the courtesy and the compassion of his contemporary Buddhists. Al-Biruni (died 1051), even pro-

duced a book on Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan entitled *The Story of the Two Statues of Bamiyan*. His book is particularly important following the destruction of the monuments by the Taliban in 2001

Al-Shahristani, who lived in the twelfth century, discussed the Buddha and Buddhism with a great deal of understanding and objectivity. He probed the five precepts (*Panca Sila*) and the ten precepts (*Dasa Sila*) in the Buddhist texts and even identified the Buddha with the Quranic figure of Al-Khidr whom the majority of Quranic commentators accept as a Prophet. The fourteenth century scholar, Rasheeduddin Fadlullah, was yet another outstanding student of Buddhism who focused upon the sublime life of Sakyamuni (the Buddha). In recent times, Muslim scholars such as Hamidullah, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Chaiwat Sathanand and Imtiyaz Yusuf, among others, have continued the tradition

Recent history of Muslim-Buddhist relationship

In the recent history of Southeast Asia, the relationship and attitude of the followers of the two religions remained significant. Indonesia, the world's biggest Muslim state, recognized Buddhism as one of its official religions since the time of Independence in 1945. The Muslim ruling elites have protected the nation's Buddhist heritage, including the gigantic Borobudur. However since the economic crisis of 1997-1998 and the collapse of the Suharto regime, the relationship between the two communities became uneasy. But the reason is more on socio-economic and socio-political situation rather than the religious

hatred.

Malaysia is another country that represents the most accommodative atmosphere for the relationship. Buddhism enjoyed full freedom, and its followers participated actively in Malaysian politics and economics.

Thailand is a different situation where Buddhists are the majority. One of the tragedies is the annexation of Muslim state of Pattani to a country known today as Thailand. Such annexation without the attempt to integrate has not been accepted, leading to revolts which are seldom mentioned in history. It is only during the brief period of Pridi Banomyong's leadership that there was hope for equality and integration. But after that the situation regressed. The recent democratization movement again offered another hope. However, the issues such as alienation, unemployment and ethnic discrimination perpetuated by Chinese Thai in business are not addressed. At the same time the young Muslims are exposed to a militant version of Islam like in other parts of the world, leading them to another front. But the killing, in particular of monks is completely disgraceful and should be justified by no Muslim.

Our challenges

Different people can live together without assimilating or destroying the identity of one another, but respecting such differences while discovering similarities or commonality.

For the long lasting resolution, the real challenge is to create empathy among people. It is a question of understanding, caring and compassion for one another. Like the Venerable Paisan mentioned in his speech, we have to transcend all exclu-

siveness, which confines us only within our own kind, but hinders us to the extend of those with differences. At the intellectual level it might be possible, but genuine and mass empathy from one community to another is difficult.

For us today the challenges become greater than before because people adopt a new kind of religion, although they claim to belong to Buddhism or Islam. This new dominant religion is capitalism. It is characterized by 3C's, namely corporate, casino, consumerism. Corporate means the greater concentration of wealth, information, technology in the hands of the few. It accentuates the hegemonic pattern of power associated with global economy, global politics, global culture and global media. The casino aspect of capitalism makes the world nothing but a gigantic gambling table for the speculation of profit. The 3C's capitalism is sustained by militarism. The economic invisible hand cannot work without the iron fist. This new religion does not care about moral values such as compassion, etc.

The contribution of Buddhists and Muslims to the world

What we should do is to do as many of us who believe in alternative values and lifestyle do, but do much more, do together and in a more systematic manner. We have to continue to confront the challenges, by assessing from our spiritual and moral perspectives whatever aspects of the 3C capitalism and the militarism, its underlying force. We have to convince that there are alternatives. We cannot accept situation where two billion dollars a day were spent on mili-

tary activity while half of the world remain very poor. It is an utter failure of civilization that we cannot provide the basic needs for all human beings.

We have to invest our intellectual efforts in making men and women of religion see what they cannot see, e.g. privatization or speculative capitalism, while they care for lottery or gambling. Or nuclear weapons, people who speak out against these issues may not be any particular religion. But they are good people, perhaps even better than many of us, because they stand for justice and are prepared to face the struggle.

Not only criticizing and negating what is wrong, let us affirm what is right at the same time. As I have done some work, what is right can be seen in seven areas, as mentioned below, that Muslims and Buddhists can share and translate into concrete policies

- 1) Living in harmony with the environment and protecting natural resources

for future generations.

- 2) Establishing government and political authority on a moral basis.
- 3) Developing the economy guided by ethical principles.
- 4) Strengthening the family as the moral foundation of society.
- 5) Reinforcing the integrity and cohesiveness of the community.
- 6) Ensuring amicable, cordial relations between different religious and cultural communities.
- 7) Evolving a culture that strengthens human character and fortifies values such as justice, compassion, love, freedom and honesty.

We can bring in people of other religions, but let Muslims and Buddhists be at the core.

The fact is that this is the continent that gave birth to world religions. Asia did not give ideology that has been popular since the 18th century like Marxism or

existentialism. What we give to the world is religion. The philosophy based on religion of the world should be our contribution in the 21st century. How do we harness that value once again to reconstruct Asia? When talking about Asia, people talk about the rising of China, India, economic prosperity in this continent. Such moves create enormous impact, of course, but what kind of impact? Is it going to be just another version of what we have seen in the last century? Is that what we want? Is this our contribution to the world? We can bring something else to the world that is the transformation which is inspired by spiritual and moral values. These are our challenge and we should not fail in responding to these challenges.

Chandra Muzaffar

delivered at the Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue "Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia: Working towards Justice and Peace" 26-28 June 2006 at Suan Dusit Place Hotel, Bangkok.

Dusit Declaration

A Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue on the theme 'Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia working towards justice and peace' was held at the Suan Dusit Place Hotel of Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Bangkok from June 26-28, 2006. It was organised jointly by the Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute (SPDI), International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB) and International Movement for a Just World (JUST).

A total of 35 participants from eight countries attended the three-day Dialogue. Most of the

participants are Buddhists and Muslims from Southeast Asia. A number of them are socially-engaged scholars and grassroots activists.

The Dialogue was part of a continuous process of interaction and engagement among individuals from the two communities that had begun ten years ago. Since Buddhists and Muslims constitute the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asia's 550 million people, dialogue aimed at enhancing understanding and empathy between the two communities is

vital for peace and harmony in the region. In view of the critical situation in Southern Thailand, the Dialogue on this occasion assumed special significance. Apart from Southern Thailand, the Dialogue also reflected upon issues of concern pertaining to the two communities in a number of other Southeast Asian countries.

The Dialogue observed that for most of history, relations between Buddhists and Muslims have been relatively harmonious. This has been due largely to a

certain degree of mutual respect and a willingness to accommodate differences. This historical backdrop should provide the two communities with the strength and resilience to overcome the challenges that confront them today.

In order to overcome these challenges, the Dialogue made the following proposals:

- Civil society groups should utilise to the fullest various information and communication channels with the aim of increasing knowledge and understanding among Buddhists and Muslims of the principal teachings of their respective religions. Towards this end, SPD, INEB and JUST undertake to produce a series of monographs in all the Southeast Asian languages which will emphasise the fundamental values and principles in Buddhism and Islam that give meaning to justice and peace. An attempt will also be made to disseminate documentaries on inter-religious harmony that embody real life episodes through various local communication channels as well as via webcasting, podcasting and broadcasting.
- The mainstream print and electronic media should highlight those moral values and ethical standards that Buddhism and Islam share in common, and at the same time explain differences in doctrines and rituals with sensitivity. It should also regard it as a duty to eradicate stereotypes and prejudices about the two religions. The media should not aggravate inter-religious ties by distorting and sensa-

tionalising events that have implications for religious harmony. In this regard, the media should not allow itself to be manipulated by opportunistic politicians and public personalities who abuse religion and nationalism for their own agendas. Civil society groups should establish 'media watches' to monitor media reporting on matters pertaining to inter-religious ties.

- Schools and universities should introduce and expand courses that seek to promote better understanding between Buddhists and Muslims. Since both religions are committed to justice and peace, it would be worthwhile to increase peace studies programmes at all levels of formal education which focus on non-violence in conflict resolution. School and university curricula should not contain materials which create animosity and perpetuate prejudice between religious and ethnic communities. Civil society groups can help to initiate the development of curricula that reflect Buddhism's and Islam's concern for justice and peace. At the same time, they should monitor school and university curricula to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on inter-religious ties.
- Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders should within the context of their respective faiths emphasise those ideas and values which conduce towards inter-religious harmony and the celebration of our common humanity. They should discard the tendency to be exclusive in their

outlook and consciously cultivate a more inclusive and universal orientation towards religion. Differences between the two religions should not be allowed to create cleavages between their followers. Buddhist monks and the *ulama* should work together to eliminate prejudices, hatreds and misconceptions that sometimes tend to separate the two communities. Both should adopt a principled position against violence, especially the killing of civilians, and the destruction of places of worship regardless of who or what the target is. In this connection, civil society groups should engage with religious leaders in order to encourage them to become more inclusive and universal in outlook and more positively orientated towards justice and peace.

- Government leaders and politicians should consciously nurture harmonious relations between Buddhists and Muslims and among people of other faiths through both their public pronouncements and policies. It would be utterly irresponsible of government leaders and politicians to exploit religious sentiments for narrow political gain. They should instead initiate meaningful reforms to existing political structures which would protect and strengthen the rights and dignity of the different religious communities. In certain situations it may even be necessary to devolve political authority through the empowerment of disenfranchised religious communities. To endow substance to

the empowerment of the community, government and political leaders should adhere to moral principles such as transparency and accountability. Civil society and the media should not hesitate to expose irresponsible leaders who divide the followers of different religions in pursuit of their self-serving political agendas.

Apart from looking at the challenges facing Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia as a whole, the Dialogue also addressed immediate and urgent issues in specific country situations. The focus was of course on Southern Thailand.

- In the case of Myanmar, there was concern over attempts by the government to control religious activities to the detriment of the communities in question. The state itself appears to be a purveyor of prejudice against certain religious communities. In Indonesia, the adverse socio-economic and socio-political situation has had a negative impact upon inter-religious relations. Unethical methods of proselytisation by groups within a particular religious community allegedly supported by foreign elements have led to a further deterioration in majority-minority ties. There is also a need for the Malaysian state to be more sensitive to some of the legitimate interests of its non-Muslim minorities.
- The Dialogue was of the view that the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) established to study the situation

in Southern Thailand deserve the wholehearted support of the nation. It is significant that the NRC declared in unambiguous terms that religion is not the cause of the violence in the South. Injustices arising from the existing judicial process and administrative system and poverty and deprivation are more important contributory factors. Historical and cultural conditions have also played a role in prodding militants to resort to violence which has been met with excessive force by the state. The NRC recommends a whole gamut of measures to overcome the violence. Among them is the establishment of a Peaceful Strategic Administrative Center for Southern Border Provinces (PSAC) which inter alia would seek to promote understanding of the situation and methods to solve the problem in all government agencies among people in the region in Thai society at large and in the international community. There is also a proposal for the state to engage in dialogue with the militants and to act decisively against state officials who abuse their power. There are also other recommendations for solving the unemployment problem, building confidence in the judicial process and improving the education system.

- The Dialogue also proposed that civil society undertake to ascertain the sentiments of the people in the three troubled provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat and Yala about the form of local governance that they prefer. A petition

with at least 50,000 signatures on the form of governance they opt for should then be presented to Parliament for deliberation. This would be in accordance with the Thai Constitution and would reflect the democratic will of the people of the three provinces.

- Monks and the ulama and Buddhist and Muslim religious leaders in general in the three provinces should make a concerted effort to break down barriers that have created a wide chasm between Buddhists and Muslims and instead build bridges of understanding between the two communities. This process would require honest and sincere introspection on the part of the religious leaders and others about their own flaws and foibles. Critical self analysis should go hand-in-hand with Buddhist-Muslim dialogue in the three Southern provinces.
- INEB and other NGOs should initiate efforts to form a "People's Watch" comprising both Buddhists and Muslims drawn from various sectors of society whose primary purpose would be to protect and safeguard places of worship, institutions of learning and hospitals among other public institutions. A "People's Watch" would not only ensure the safety and security of these institutions but more significantly, it would also help foster a spirit of togetherness among Buddhists and Muslims.
- Both Buddhists and Muslims from neighbouring countries especially those

representing the influential strata in religion, politics and the media should assist in whatever way possible in the process of dialogue and reconciliation in southern Thailand. More specifically they should try to strengthen a more inclusive and universal approach to both religions informed by values of justice, compassion and forgiveness.

Enhancing understanding and empathy between Buddhists

and Muslims in Southeast Asia has become imperative in view of the overwhelming power and influence of contemporary global capitalism rooted in global hegemony. The hegemonic power of global capitalism is the new 'religion' which threatens to undermine the universal, spiritual and moral values and world views embodied in Buddhism, Islam and other religions. This is why Buddhists, Muslims and others should forge a more profound unity and solidarity which will be able to offer another

vision of a just, compassionate and humane universal civilization.

It is with this mission in mind that we hereby announce the launch of a permanent Buddhist-Muslim Citizens' Commission for Southeast Asia.

28 June 2006

Conclusion of the Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue "Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia: Working towards Justice and Peace", 26-28 June 2006 at Suan Dusit Place Hotel, Bangkok.

Peace Cannot Live Where There Is No Trust

In Greek mythology, Eros said to Psyche, "Love cannot live where there is no trust". If peace is put in place of love in the sentence, it is also valid. When trust disappears, peace is also gone. The question of trust is somehow related to the question of how understanding is cultivated. And to do so is to overcome ignorance, if speaking from a Buddhist point of view.

From that foundation, a pilot training on Creation of Peaceful Multi-religious Communities was organized in early July. The training is an experimental program attempting to respond to the increasing misunderstanding among religious communities in Siam, particularly the conflicts and violence in the southern provinces in which the majority is Muslim.

In order to be aware of ignorance and hatred, it is important for the Buddhist majority to understand prejudices and stereotypes with the help of Buddhist teachings. Buddhism



provides a transforming process to be open-minded, compassionate, and respectful of and cooperative with people of different beliefs, which is the first step to involve oneself in inter-religious peace work.

Understanding one's own prejudices

The program began with getting to know each other and skills to work together in the following days. Then, the participants were

asked to analyze their own mind using the "egg in a pan" diagram. The egg yolk (representing one's self) sits happily in the egg white which is the comfort zone. The participants wrote the things that they feel comfortable concerning the relationship with people of different religions in the egg white area. The pan represents the uncomfortable zone, in which the participants wrote on things that they find uncomfortable.

For the participants, the uncomfortable zone includes items such as talking to people from different religions especially those without knowledge of their religion, paying respect to monks/ordained people from other sects, talking about conflicts, quarrels, or disputes, etc.

Kittichai Ngamchaipisit, the facilitator then asked the participants to draw whatever they have in mind when they hear of Muslims and Christians. From the drawing, we can see the stereotype that Buddhists in general have about people from different religions. For example, Muslims are seen as Arab-looking people, serious practitioners, terrorists, and violent, women with headscarves and men with four wives. As for Christians the stereotypes are being active in conversion, rich and powerful, well organized, generosity, westerners, friendly, charity, modernity, etc.

By this exercise, participants became aware of their own biases and perceptions distorted by limited contact and information about other religions as well as by news and other mass media.

Observing one's feeling

The past activities were about the recollection of the participants. Then for the participants to practice observing their fresh feeling, the facilitator brought them to visit a Christian church. They were told to silently walk around, examine objects in the church including images while observing the feelings arising in their minds.

Coming back, the participants shared their feelings. Some felt awkward and uncomfortable while being in a church. Some felt curious to know about the rituals/ceremonies which are

usually performed in the place. Some discovered that the same serenity can also be found in the places of other religions.

Then, the facilitator, Ven. Maha Cherdchai gave a Buddhist teaching on prejudice. According to Buddhism, there are four causes of prejudice, i.e. love, hate, ignorance and fear.

Gevalaya Dhamma and other related teachings

Ven. Maha Cherdchai talked about Gevalaya Dhamma in the next session. It is a profound Buddhist teaching introduced by the late Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa who was interested in inter-religious issues. The teaching is about an ultimate nature which is a common ground for every religion and belief. Besides, he picked up several stories and teachings in Buddhism that support the open-mindedness and respect of other religions.

Common suffering: Consumerism and social injustice

The next part is for the participants to understand the violence of social structure that is shared by people of all religions. They also analyzed how advertisement and consumerism worked together to make people unsatisfied with themselves and to perpetuate craving, as well as how such feeling is against religious values. Materialism and consumerism become real threat to all religions because they promote competition, selfishness, narrow-mindedness, violence, exploitation of human and nature, and greed. Such characteristics destroy the teaching of love and compassion, contentment, generosity and sharing, and non-attachment to self shared by all religions.

Inter-religious dialogue

The previous sessions prepared the participants to be ready to get into a dialogue with friends from other religions. Then, two guests were invited. They are Mr. Narit Maneekhao (a Catholic) and Mr. Ekarin Tuansiri (a Muslim). Mr. Narit is a social activist in peacemaking, e.g. youth and peace camp, religious cooperation for conflict resolution program. Mr. Ekarin is actively engaged in many programs on the reconciliation of unrests in the southern provinces. The topic they shared with us included the core teachings, their view on different religions, and the desirable society from their religion's view.

According to Mr. Narit, though there are more than one thousand sects in Christianity but Jesus only talked about love, patience and sacrifice as the ultimate belief. The early Christian community represents the desirable society, because all property was shared by its members. No one was hungry or homeless. People shared both materials and life experiences. Talking about the social illness in modern time, *the sinful structure* as he put it, the problem is that there is no sharp indicator from an ethical or a religious perspective to point out what is right or wrong, e.g. in the debate about GMO. He himself studied Buddhist teachings and meditation from monks and found that by so doing, he deepens his Christian understanding and practice.

Mr. Ekarin said that dialoguing with different religions is a duty of Muslims. To him, Islam is the way of life from birth to death with Mohammed as a role model. There is no separation between religion and political economic dimensions. Although

there are four major schools of Islamic thought, but the most important aspect is the Koran. Religious organizations have immense influence on people's life. Decisions on new issues are made at national and world councils of religious scholars. He also said that the problems that facing Muslims now is the distorted information about Muslims in the media. People are made to see Muslims as terrorists or separatists. It is possibly because Islamic teachings are opposite to capitalism, e.g. interest is prohibited, compulsory sharing to the deprived people, profit sharing, etc. Then he talked about the ignorance of the Thai authority on the religious identity of the Thai Muslim in the south, resulting in violence and conflicts. The government-appointed National Reconciliation Committee (NRC), in trying to open dialogue and restore harmony proposed suggestions to the government. It is unfortunate that due to the current political instability, no one cares about the proposal.

The next session was again for the participants to analyze their own feelings while listening to the guests. The facilitator raised some provoking sentences from the guests' talk and the NRC proposal as objects to examine. The proposal called for the establishment of a shariah court, the use of Yawee as a working language, civil servants must be local people, income tax collected in the three provinces are to be used locally, and the right to impeach bad civil servants. The participants at first felt shocked that the proposal violates the national identity and sovereignty as well as hurts the feeling of the majority Buddhists. However, after a careful scrutiny of the



proposal with loving-kindness and justice, the participants found that the request is justified.

Social action practice

The last part was for social action. After the participants have gone through the transforming process, they must engage in social action to send the message of inter-religious peace and harmony to public.

The participants agreed and formed themselves a group called "The Buddhists for Religious Relations and Peace". Then, among several options, the participants chose to write a statement to express their support for the Centre for Peace and Development Studies, Mahidol University. It engages with non-violent reconciliation and dialogue in the south. The participants were welcome by Dr. Gothom Areeya, the President of Centre for Peace and Development Studies. He is also the Secretary General of the National Reconciliation Commission and President of the National Economic and Social Advisory Council.

Then the representative of the group read a statement.

After that they shared with Dr Gothom about their attempt to encourage more Buddhists to be sensitive to the problems of distrust among religious communities and violent suppression to Muslim communities in the south of Siam. Then another representative gave a bouquet as the token of support to Dr Gothom's mission, followed by short chanting from the monks and nuns.

Their experience of social action was shared and they summarized the lessons learnt in the evening. Since the training is new and the participants are not skilled, the facilitator canceled options that require bold action, such as campaigning in the street. Although it is quite mild in the facilitator's view, for all participants, it is a new and uncomfortable challenge already.

The participants felt that, even though they are ordinary people, they can communicate their views to a high ranking official. They became aware of their responsibility to contribute to the issue of inter-religious harmony, especially among Buddhists and Muslims in Siam.

Lapapan Supamanta

Buddhists and Muslims in Southeast Asia: Working Towards Justice and Peace

Following the Muslim-Buddhist Dialogue organized by INEB at Suan Dusit Palace Hotel, Suan Dusit Rajabhat University, Bangkok on June 26 – 28, 2006, in which there were well over 150 local and foreign participants from Malaysia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Laos, and Cambodia, it was felt that there should be a follow up meeting in Songkhla to include Muslim and Buddhist leaders in southern Thailand.

Since the three southern provinces of Thailand that included Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani are under constant acts of violence and hostility, so far incurring over 1,000 deaths in the past two years, the daily lives of the local inhabitants have been severely disrupted from the once peaceful coexistence among the various ethnic and religious groups. All sides now live in a state of fear. As time passes, there seems to be no end to violence – violence tends to perpetuate more violence.

Through the auspices of the Sub-Committee on the Protection of Human Rights I, Thailand National Commission on Human Rights, a roundtable discussion, led by the prominent social critique and highly respected peace advocate, Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa, was held with the local Muslim and Buddhist leaders in Songkhla on July 7–9, 2006. The themes of the discussion were carried over from the meeting at Suan Dusit Palace Hotel where the participants came to an agreement to pursue

an action plan to achieve peace and harmony in the region – known as Dusit Declaration.

Even with increased manpower and public budget poured into the three southern states, there is no end in sight. The overall disregard of the Draft Proposal sent to the government by the National Conciliation Commission set up over a year ago, and headed by the former two-time Prime Minister, Anand Panyarachun, to look into the means and ways to end the conflicts in the deep south creates further discords among all concerned parties.

The failure by the government to stop the violence in the south of Thailand, prompts many individuals to search for alternative solutions to end the crisis. Through direct initiations of Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa, it is felt that ordinary civilians, private organizations, and nongovernment organizations too could play an active role in mediating the conflicts in the south.

On a spiritual level, by pursuing and applying religious principles instead of mere economic and military measures, whether they be Christianity, or Buddhism, Islam, or Hinduism, peace could be achieved and normalcy returned to the southern provinces.

Although their paths may differ, all major religions have the same goals in life. At the start, it is important that all sides come to term with the truth, and reach out in full compassion to offer and accept acts of contrition from

the other sides. Once trust is re-established in the south, everything-else will follow in due course.

Initially, it was hoped that Chandra Muzaffar from the International Movement for a Just World, could join in the discussion in Songkhla. Unfortunately, due to time and budget constraints, it was with deep regret that the invitations could not be extended to him on this occasion. However, further meetings are being planned in southern Thailand, with invitations to include both local participants and from abroad.

It needs to be added here that the visit to the south was made to coincide with the presentation of the Midnight University Award. This year the Award was presented to the villagers of Ra-yae, Songkhla province, for their courage and bravery in protesting against the laying of the Thai-Malaysian Gas Pipeline that would have an immense effect on the nearby environments. Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa was invited to deliver the keynote address and present the Award to the villagers.

Siroj Angsuwat



Activities Update

INEB *Young Bodhisattva* Training Program

The INEB 2006 “*Young Bodhisattva*” Youth Buddhist Leadership Training

INEB organized the 2006 “*Young Bodhisattva*” Youth Buddhist Leadership Training for Spiritual Resurgence and Social Transformation during 16 May - 24 June 2006. They were young monks, nuns and laypeople from Southeast Asia and South Asia. We had for the first time new members from Shan State (in Myanmar), Tibet (in China) and Ladakh (in India). They spent six weeks learning about the current situation in Asia, Buddhist teachings to understand violence within ourselves and in social structures, several development projects and basic skills for social work. The program also offered a meditation retreat in a forest monastery.

Alumni's activities

April 2006: Prashant Varma (our alumni in 2004) and Jennifer Yo (alumni from INEB Youth Camp in 2005) organized a training for Dalit Buddhist youth in Dehradun.



May 2006: Eddy Setiawan was our alumni in 2004. He is now the leader of HIKMAHBUDHI (The Union of Indonesian Buddhist Students.) In May 2006 his organization provided relief and helped remove damaged houses for survivors of an earthquake in Yogyakarta.

July 2006: Suresh Chandra Buddha, President of Youth Buddhist Society of India, was INEB Youth Buddhist Leadership Training alumni in 2005. In 8-10 July 2006 he organized the “*Buddha and World Peace*” conference in Manipuri, UP, India, where around 4,000 people turned up. He said in his report, “*it was a first historical Buddha’s teaching among the Shakya family, 95% of the Shakya family attended the teaching. People have learnt real Buddhism without any criticism. It was big news in newspapers continuously for 8 days. We hope it was a foundation of Buddhism in the 21st century among the Shakya family*”.



Gevalayadhamma

Gevalayadhamma is another significant and profound work of the late Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. Gevalaya means spreading or pervading throughout time and space without exception. This book played important role in creating understanding among people of differences. Dr. Suwanna Satha-anan and the Ven. Thaweesak led a two-day seminar on this book as a part of the Dhammaghosana Seminar Series to celebrate the centenary of its author. The following is the summary of some main points of the seminar.

Buddhism has several features which are different from other religions. The first cause which is important for the theist religions is seen as not necessary to the cessation of suffering. The life of Jesus is important to a Christian, while a Buddhist practicing eightfold path can enlighten without the need to know the life of the Buddha. Theistic religions are narrative, emphasizing on parables or mythology, Buddhism is meditative, seeing that stories are only conventional truth. Other religions get involved in laypeople's life, e.g. marriage. Buddhist monks would avoid it.

But the late Venerable Bhikkhu Buddhadasa introduced the teaching he named *gevalayadhamma* so as to find common ground for theist and atheist religions could meet.

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa explained the first cause, not as a personification, but as a law called *idappaccayata*. There is the law, which is always at work and resulting in evolution and all



things. It is interesting to see why Bhikkhu Buddhadasa introduced *gevalayadhamma*, in addition to *idappaccayata* and *patīcasamuppada*

According to Suwanna, *patīcasamuppada* can explain the origin of human suffering, but it does not describe the origin of the universe as other theist religions do. She understood that *gevalayadhamma* is to explain the oneness of a pattern which is ever-changing and diverse. Another simile used to explain it is the image of Indra's net of the Huayen sect of Mahayana Buddhism. The difference is that the Indra's net explains a picture of a snapshot, while *gevalayadhamma* adds dimension of time into it.

Another meaning of *gevalayadhamma* is the thing that exists before other things. In Buddhist context, there is no "first cause" but *pathama dhatu* (first element). The element here is not scientific substances. It is generally understood as earth, water, air and fire elements that are lively. Buddhadasa used "the

first element" to mean the "first cause" But to him the first element does not mean the four elements, but a set of law that governs all things. It is *gevalayata* or *nibbana* or *dhatu*. It is the first element or the origin because it always exists no matter whether there arises the Buddha or not, such law already exists.

In *gevalayadhamma* Bhikkhu Buddhadasa talked about the Buddhahood or bio-evolution. For a thing to come into existence, it must have potentiality. The mango tree is there in the mango seed. It will not grow out to be a jackfruit tree. With the right cause and condition, the potentiality becomes actuality. According to him, finally a pebble will get enlightened. Suwanna explained that the pebble, through time, it decays and turns to be dirt. It fosters life from vegetable to animal to human being until practicing dhamma and reaching enlightenment. *Gevalayadhamma* explains a process of changes through time from one thing to another until enlightenment. It provides a tool to understand that there is potentiality of life in all things. If we see the potentiality of life in a pebble, we would understand the interconnectedness and finally we will see the world as one.

Gevalayadhamma makes us understand ourselves from one point in time to another. At the point A, one may think that one is alone in the world and can do anything. Moving to point B by noticing that life is a process including many other things, one starts to think about interest of others. One would reduce attach-

ment to one's own self and interest, and close the division between self vs. other. There would be no "I" as a Buddhist, a monk, a Thai, etc. Everything and everybody becomes one. Though there are all kinds of differences there is no room for fighting. Gavalayadhamma talked about oneness from both space and time dimensions.

The late Bhikkhu Buddhadasa is exceptional in Theravada Buddhism. His extensive studies in other religions and other Buddhist traditions took him out of the boundary of Theravada. He never stayed in a Zen or Christian monastery, but his openness came from thorough study of Theravada Buddhism. Then he could break through and extend friendship to other religions.

Suwanna felt surprised when reading the famous 3-point resolution of Buddhadasa. A common Theravada monk would wish everyone to attain *nibbana*. But Buddhadasa wished each one to attain the highest condition in one's own religion. It represents his open-mindedness, as wide as an ocean. This attitude is helpful in creating inter-religious understanding.

Gevalayadhamma represents an attempt of Buddhadasa to explain God so as to find common ground for inter-religious dialogue. To him, God is a law that creates things, not a personified God as a Creator. Personification of God is difficult for the Buddhist to understand because of the teaching of self negation. Buddhadasa also presented the theory of human language—religious language to overcome the limitation of words in explaining the truth. Since word can convey meaning through classification. If a thing is called cup, meaning that a lot of things which is clas-

sified as not a cup. Then when we want to talk about a condition of oneness or wholeness without classification, there is no word for it. Therefore, different religion has to use different word to explain the same thing. Buddhadasa gave credits to Taoism that this religion can teach this point by neither personifying it nor naming it. Such condition is beyond any words, but for the time being, let's call it Tao, but the word is not real Tao, as the first sentence in Tao Te Ching.

For the purpose of inter-religious dialogue, Buddhadasa proposed many ideas to create common ground. He said that the teaching of other religions on God is for the devotees to surrender their self, similar to the selflessness in Buddhism.

Buddhadasa's approach to inter-religious relations is comparable to John Hick. Hick noticed that each religion claims that it shows the highest truth. Then who should we believe? According to logics, there are four possibilities; all are wrong, all are both right and wrong, only one is right, and finally all are right. In general, people fall into the third possibility but to be nice we act as the second. Those who don't believe in God are the bravest declaring the first. Buddhadasa tried to find a way to secure the fourth. He must explain that all are different and contradictory, but all are right.

Hick tried by suggesting to us to change the question. Instead of asking a self-centered question (which one is true?) the question would be reality centered. Any religion that is able to make the follower realize the reality is the true one. Putting in Buddhist term, we should look whether Buddhists mitigate their selfishness. How about the Taoists, the

Christians, the Muslims, etc.? If they are so, it can be held that such religious teaching is true or should be true.

Buddhadasa gave a simile that spiritual practice is like reaching a house in the high mountain. We human beings each receives one different key and one different map, without knowing that the goal is the very same house. If one traveler happens to see the other's map, and cannot understand it, they might fight over the accuracy of the map.

Therefore, Buddhadasa when introducing Gevalayadhamma, hoped to point out that in the world of reality, all phenomena are under a set of law. And this law holds the whole different patterns as oneness. The ultimate condition of all religions is the same, no need to fight over it, but the explanation of it and approach towards it differ. Buddhists and Christians do not have to quarrel on the explanation and approach so long as they take us to reach the goal of our own religion.

There is another small book by Buddhadasa entitled *No Religion*. He hoped that if people progress in their own spiritual practice, they can live peacefully together in the spiritual dimension but as if there is no religion. The Ven. Taweesak encouraged the participants to learn from other religions and to have dialogue with them. The conflict arises because people have a herd instinct. Herd instinct makes us remain within the same kind and hinder us from reaching out to and learning from others.

Dr. Suwanna Satha-anand
and
Ven. Tweesak Ciradhammo

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa: A Thai Honored by the World

I To the question why the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation via the Thai Ministry of Education nominated Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's name to UNESCO in order to be recognized as one of the world's great personalities, I will clarify as follows. Since Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat came to power in 1957-58, the main pillars of Thai society have been under a spell, making them worship absolutist rulers and look down on commoners. In particular, commoners who possessed ideas or performed deeds that challenge social hierarchies and the centralization of power by the ruling elites and that foster meaningful democracy would be terrorized and their reputations discredited through various means. If they weren't killed or imprisoned, they were demonized. Witness the case of Pridi Banomyong. On the contrary, the monument of the devious and corrupt Sarit Thanarat stands at the center of Khon Khaen province, and there has been no official attempt to blemish his reputation.

We haven't recognized that building monuments of wicked individuals and lacking the courage to openly express the truth put society in danger in every possible way. The Sarit Thanarat monument in Khon Khaen, the Phibunsongkram monument in Lopburi, and the Phao Sriyanon monument at the Police Cadet Academy in Samphran all testify to their despotism. Their contemporaries docilely accepted their malevolence. The wickedness of Thaksin Shinawatra has

benefited from this atmosphere and from the lack of moral courage in mainstream Thai society.

Here's a case for comparison. Laos used to have a monument of M. Pavée who promoted the virtues of being under French protectorate. When Laos declared its independence, the Pavée monument was thrown into the Mekhong River. Or look at Mongolia. When it freed itself from the Soviet Union, all the monuments of Lenin were brought down. And we won't be able to find a Hitler monument in Germany.

There are also monuments of royal family members in various provinces—Ubonratchathani, Udonthani, etc. Have we ever questioned to what extent those individuals contributed to the country and the people?

The Ministry of Education had only nominated the names of royal family members to UNESCO, starting with Prince Damrong in 1962. Others include Prince Naris, Kings Rama II, IV, V, and VI, Prince Patriarch Paramanuchit, and Prince Wan. The only commoner the Ministry ever nominated was the poet Sunthorn Poo. And here we are not even mentioning the nominations of the King's Father and Mother.

I don't detest the adoration of royals. But we must not forget that they are much fewer in number than commoners. Why don't we nominate ordinary individuals who had been beneficent so the world may also know about them? And didn't the abovementioned royals also have flaws? Or are we prioritizing blood at the

expense of other considerations? Although she was born a lowly commoner but ultimately bore two monarchs, the Princess Mother soon earned a transcendental status, which the world must recognize? If this is the case, mustn't all Queen Mothers in the world be recognized as great personalities?

Few dare to express this dissenting view out loud. Therefore, the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation nominated the name of commoner [to UNESCO] so the world would know that the virtues of the Thai people are not monopolized by a single family. The nominee was Pridi Banomyong who was much maligned in Thai society despite his enormous contributions. The occasion was Pridi's 100th anniversary in 2000. Pridi's name might not have been submitted to UNESCO had it not been for PM Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's efforts. (This seems to be his only virtue.) Even when UNESCO in Paris was on the verge of recognizing Pridi, the Thai delegate tried to forestall it, insisting that only the Princess Mother should be recognized. Their reasoning is that a royal shouldn't be treated on an equal par as a commoner. What nonsense!

I had alerted the students of Professor Silpa Bhirasri (Corrado Feroci) to nominate his name via the Thai government to UNESCO speedily in order to commemorate his centenary. This would not only be an honor to beauty, knowledge, and education (which are all beneficial to contemporaries) but would also benefit the image of the Thai government in

terms of its cosmopolitanism. Silpa Bhirasri eventually became a Thai citizen and contributed immensely to the development and conservation of the arts in the kingdom. Among his contemporaries, he was virtually unparalleled in terms of the art.

I told Silpa Bhirasri's students that if they didn't act quickly, their professor's name would be dropped from the Ministry of Education's shortlist since he was a contemporary of Prince Mahidol, and it is highly unlikely that the Thai government would nominate another figure to rival the King's father, however, the two were distinguished in different domains. Prince Mahidol devoted his life to medical research, nursing, and public health while Silpa Bhirasri excelled in the arts and culture.

My guess was proved correct as the Ministry of Education eventually did not nominate Professor Silpa Bhirasri's name to UNESCO to be recognized as one of the world's great personalities.

The Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation itself did not nominate Silpa Bhirasri because the Fine Arts Department and the Silpakorn University were already involved in the matter. Students of Silpa Bhirasri even erected his monument at Silpakorn University, to the chagrin of high government officials at the time.

The first person the Foundation ever nominated to UNESCO was Phya Anumanrajadhon. The nomination met no opposition because he had no enemies (though some did not appreciate his achievement when he was alive). The Foundation had also nominated Kularb Saipradit to be recognized by UNESCO; again there was no opposition since his enemies were the mili-

tary dictators and tyrants like Sarit Thanarat, and they were no longer in power.

Kularb Saipradit's centenary coincided with that of his contemporary, Direk Jayanama. The latter deserved to be commemorated both at the national and the international levels. The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs however did not nominate his name to UNESCO since the then foreign minister did not have the eye to do so. The then foreign minister was deluded by his own grandeur and even shamelessly dreamed of becoming the next UN Secretary General. Worse, he had used taxpayers' money to try to satiate his arrogance.

Via the Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Political Science, Thammasat University, nominated Direk Jayanama's name to UNESCO; Direk was the faculty's first dean. But it failed to fathom and captivate his extraordinariness. UNESCO had asked the Thai government to rewrite its proposal, but no one brushed up the matter, and therefore the nomination did not make it.

This means that we don't have the eye to appreciate Direk Jayanama, whose ethical and political stature is far superior to Prince Wan's. The latter was undoubtedly very knowledgeable and cultivated. But Direk did not serve the powers-that-be, especially politicians who came to power through undemocratic means.

It seems that Prince Wan more or less saw Direk's virtues. As Deputy Prime Minister, Prince Wan requested that Direk be royally decorated with the Dushdi Mala medal of Merit for services to the state while the latter was terminally ill at Siriraj Hospital. The ceremony took

place at the hospital some time before Direk passed away. The then foreign minister, who had served under Direk, had not even considered bestowing such honor on his former superior.

Above is a brief background of nominating the names of Thai citizens via the Thai government to UNESCO. You may feel that I've made an overly long detour from the topic of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. But few have dared to articulate this background to the public. I therefore feel that these facts must be widely known. Otherwise, honoring or praising someone would be indistinguishable from sycophancy—as has often happened in Thai society. It seems that here we only celebrate or eulogize the dead. Even monks do it at funerals. It also seems that royal decorations and medals tend to only go to the rich and the powerful, mostly morally half-baked individuals as well as honorary degrees.

Were Field Marshal Phibun still in power, the names of royals would never be sent to UNESCO. The only exception might have been Prince Naris who was greatly respected by that military dictator. Phibun also intensely detested Prince Damrong. The prince was more hapless than people thought.

As for Pridi Banomyong, although the prime minister sponsored the commemorative centennial anniversary ceremonies, both Chuan Leekpai and Thaksin Shinawatra only did so half-heartedly. Perhaps they were afraid of truthfulness and moral courage. Perhaps they did not possess the eye to see Pridi's beneficence and extraordinariness. It seems that they lack the quality of being a grateful person, which in Buddhism is an attribute of a good person. Most of the

Thai ruling elites are simply ungrateful.

No Thai government has meaningfully commemorated virtuous individuals. Yes, names were nominated to UNESCO and ceremonies were organized. But they all lacked substance. How will the future generation be persuaded to emulate these individuals? The commemoration of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's centenary will likely suffer from the same fate. There will be only fanfare, and no substance.

II

I will now frankly talk about the nomination of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's name via the Ministry of Education to UNESCO. The point I'd like to emphasize is that it doesn't matter whether or not the Ministry of Education or UNESCO really thinks Bhikkhu Buddhadasa is one of the world's great personalities. This is because he is a very important person for Thai society and for the world in the contemporary context; in this sense he is very much like Pridi Banomyong. Furthermore, as a Buddhist monk, he holds an exalted stature, showing that a life of celibacy is blissful and best.

At the same time there are lots of shameless or fake monks donning the yellow robes. Some even have high ecclesiastical titles, but they may not be as worthy as society thinks they are. In present day Siam the Sangha has lamentably become a pawn of consumerism. And the higher a monk climbs the ecclesiastical ladder, the more he unequivocally supports absolutism and nationalism—the less he is awakened in the Buddhist sense, which entails nonviolence. These days it is extremely difficult to find an ethically courageous

monk in the Sangha Supreme Council, a monk who wisely employs the Wheel of Dhamma to advise the State to be more mindful and less greedy, hateful, and ignorant.

It was a relatively easy task compiling relevant information on Bhikkhu Buddhadasa for the Thai government and UNESCO. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa wrote many books, and many have written about him or his teachings. Of course, UNESCO was looking for his significance just in terms of education, science, and culture. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa was highly informed in these three fields, judging from his written work, interviews, and sermons. He challenged mainstream education, contending that it is detrimental rather than beneficial to students. He argued that mainstream education teaches individuals to be selfish and amoral, employing greed, hatred, and delusion as the guiding star. He compared such education to a tailless dog. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa felt that it is incorrect to separate 'theory' from the practice in Buddhism; that is, the study of the Scriptures from meditation practice. Nor did he think it right to categorize monks into town-monk or forest monk. When education for monks became worldlier so that young males from poor families could later disrobe and take part in climbing the social, economic, and political ladder, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa stated that it was killing both Buddhism and the students as they would be enmeshed in the Wrong View.

In the mainstream it is a matter of who has a BA, MA, or PhD or who doesn't. One may feel inferior to someone with a higher degree or someone who graduated from a more pre-

stigious school. In this context, traditional knowledge and local wisdom are degraded. All these foster arrogance and self-attachment.

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa therefore tried to find a way out by becoming a servant of the Buddha. He felt that being awakened from defilements is the heart of education. As such, emphasis should be given to morality (normality at the personal and the collective levels), mindfulness (ability for self-contemplation and criticism, the fusion of the mind with the heart, holism as opposed to compartmentalization, and inter-being), and wisdom or understanding things 'as they are.'

The three-fold training of morality, mindfulness, and wisdom is useful for confronting or alleviating suffering not only at the personal level but also at the social level. The sources of suffering are greed (capitalism), hatred (militarism), and delusion (-isms fed by mainstream education and mass media).

Bhikkhu Buddhadasa was the first or only contemporary monk who applied the study of Buddhism to politics. His tome *Dhammic Socialism* deserves serious contemplation.

Now that we are trapped in consumerism, we should refer to his work on consumption, lust, and prestige (social ranking). He pointed to the pitfalls of monoculturalism which comes in the forms of American imperialism and TNCs. We can now see monoculturalism in Thaksinomics. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa alerted us to understand local wisdom (including traditional lullabies) and to appreciate the Dhammic insights that nature has to offer.

Mainstream culture indoc-

trinates people to aspire for consumption, lust, and prestige. Traditional culture, which is rooted in Buddhism, helps to awaken people from these defilements, thereby redirecting us to the Dhamma and hence to enlightenment.

According to Bhikkhu Buddhadasa, science means truly understanding the essence of culture and education, which transcends religious divisions and approaches the truth that transcends the worldly or human languages since it is the Dhammic language. This language is the science of the supramundane. With this science, people can be with one another with respect and understanding, despite their religious differences, since superficiality is replaced by profoundness; that is, self-effacement or the reduction of selfishness, of self-attachments. In other words, this is peace. There is no real happiness aside from peace. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa encouraged us to respect our Muslim friends. He urged us to forgive those who have harmed or exploited us. In Buddhism, generosity is the first of the Ten Perfections. A rudimentary form of generosity is the donation of

material requisites. A higher one is the giving of the Dhamma, which entails confronting the truth, finding the truth, and publicizing the truth—even if it may be against mainstream conviction. Above the gift of the Dhamma is forgiveness or the freedom from fear. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa taught us to die a little each day; that is, to die before our actual deaths. This means to gradually reduce our self-attachments, enabling life to be led with mindfulness and conscience; that is, with freedom from fear. We'll begin to serve all sentient beings—as worthy servants of the Awakened One. All of us can be servants of the Buddha like him. And if we take the Three Refuges, we won't live for money, power, prestige, and property—but will appreciate simplicity, sufficiency, and harmony.

That Phra Maha Ngerm Inthapanyo declared himself the servant of the Buddha on the full moon day of May 1932 was an event that guides us beyond worldly dominations—e.g., by the Sangha, political institutions, economic institutions, mainstream education etc. He enabled us to return to the true state of

being awakened that was introduced by the Lord Buddha over 2500 years ago. Unfortunately, the road to this awakened state is gradually fading. His contemporaries increasingly saw Buddhism as simply being about morality, about the next world, or about merits and karma. But the servant of the Buddha restored the highest ideal to Thai society: it is still possible to retrace the footsteps of the Buddha if one goes to the heart of Buddhism which entails the emancipation from defilements, thereby moving within the cool shade of enlightenment. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa guided us to this substance through his practice and words. Even his temple is filled with the power of liberation, nudging us towards nonviolence, equality, fraternity, accountability, transparency, and justice. This is real liberation or the freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion and the movement towards calmness and awakened-ness.

Translated from a lecture
in Thai by Sulak Sivaraksa,
19 May 2006,
Suan Dusit Ratchapat
University

Audio guide for inner Bangkok

The Sathirakoses Nagapradipa Foundation, a non-profit organisation has launched an audio guide in MP3 format for the inner Bangkok area allowing foreign visitors to explore Rattanakosin Island and 15 attractions in the vicinity on their own.

A team of the foundation compiled the information following extensive research on the historical landmarks and materials supplied by leading academics including social critic Sulak Sivaraksa, before posting it on www.soundtrek.org from where it can be downloaded.

The foundation plans to add a Thai version in due course.

Meanwhile, 10 sets of the audio guide are available at Rim Khob Fah bookstore near Democracy Monument. They can be rented for a price of 200 baht per 2 hrs. More Detail Scontact Tel. 0-2438-0353.



“Global Empire or Universal Civilization?”

The 12th Annual Sem Pringpuangkaew

Public Lecture

The lecture will be divided into three sub themes. Firstly, the attempt of Washington elites to establish the global empire in human history and its failure in the leadership. Secondly, the strong possibility that the multi-polar global system will emerge. Lastly, because of this, the citizen of the world may be able to establish a just, compassionate, humane, egalitarian, universal civilization.

The attempt towards a US global empire

The global empire did not begin with the neo-conservatives who surrounded President George Bush who are responsible for the idea of global empire, as many believe. The drive towards empire began with the end of World War II. USA emerged from World War II as the world's most powerful nation. It is very powerful economically, scientifically, technically, and most of all, militarily.

The US announced to the world that it is going to rule the world through two bombs that it dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. It was a proclamation of US military might. At the same time the US helped create the UN which is going to be one of the institutions that allowed US to dominate the world. The US has also controlled numerous multinational and transnational corporations.

But its dream of leading the world was spoiled by two developments. That is the rise of communism and the establish-

ment of two centers of communist power: Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which was known as the creation of the Iron curtain. And the other, also in 1949, was the establishment of the Chinese Communist Party in the October Revolution. Communism to some extent was a bulwark against US dominance. The other major challenge came from nationalism, the rise of independent nation states in Asia and Africa. They were eager to ensure that they are able to play a role in global affairs. So both communism and nationalism, in a sense, acted to slow down the drive towards the Empire.

After a few decades it changed. Nationalism waned. Communism declined with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. By the beginning of the 1990s we have the one superpower of the world with its role to rule global affairs. This is what President George Bush Sr. meant when he said that it's going to be the New World Order. After him, there was the same drive towards empire under Clinton. After Clinton is President George Bush Jr. The neo-conservative realized that the time has come that they will be able to establish a global empire. For the decade that they have been writing books, articles, giving interviews, etc. about the global empire. Their thinking is very clear cut that there is no other nation than the USA that was the only world military superpower. The US

must use that power to dominate and rule the world for the good of humankind. This is their objective - *The Pax Americana*. The US should not hesitate to use its military power to achieve this goal. What it has to do is to control the world resources.

The first target was of course Afghanistan. But the attack could not happen without any good excuse. And the excuse came from 9-11. 9-11 provided the perfect excuse because it meant that the US was the target. Terrorists targeted the US and the US had to respond and launched the war on terror to protect the USA and the world. To fight against terrorism, the US and its allies went to Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban. This operation achieved its goal. Caspian Sea oil is the oil of Central Asia. This is the plan to create empire and control oil which is the root of the civilization.

Then there was another war in 2003. With the accusation of destructive weapons in Iraq that might fall into the hand of terrorists. To make the world safe, Washington and its allies entered Iraq and established their control over it. Iraq is the world's second largest exporter of oil. It is also strategically very important to the global politics of West and Central Asia.

And there is the plan to gain control over Iran. Iran is again rich in oil. It is the major exporter of oil and gas to China and Russia. The large percentage of oil supplied to China is from

Iran. Iran is important because it is a Shiah community. After the Taliban was toppled, the Shiah communities are able to play a role in Afghan politics. Iran is important in Lebanon, Bahrain and Iraq because of the majority of Shiah communities. So someone has to curb Iran.

Possibility for a multi-polar global system

The failure of US policies emerge if we look closely at the situation in the Middle East. Firstly, even though Afghanistan is under the control of the US, it is in a chaotic and instable state. In Iraq, there is no peace and stability. The US mission there is not finished and it is unable to survey the oil sources. The recovery needs huge money. It is assumed that the US must spend more than one trillion in Iraq.

In Palestine, the US uses Israel, one of its close allies, to dominate. Israel exercised its hegemonic power over the land and people of Palestine for five decades but there is no sign that the violence will end. There are uprisings and resistance against Israel so often that Israel cannot control the situation. Hence, that USA and its allies are successful in establishing the global empire is not true, particularly in the Middle East. The allies began to say they are not to go along with the US.

In other region, like Latin America, during the past few years, there are significant changes. Elections in countries like Venezuela, Bolivia, and Chile sent messages that they do not accept the Washington Consensus that is linked closely with Washington's economic philosophy of liberal capitalism. They reject this type of economic policy

which aggravated the problems of Latin America.

The next factor is the rise of China in both economics and politics. China is very significant in counterbalancing Washington's dominance. The role of China is especially important and irreversible in the global economic system. China is named the factory of the world. In the next twenty year, China's role will increase.

Russia, which is prepared to work with the USA immediately after the post Cold War, announced that it would be independent, especially in security issues. It doesn't want US intervention in areas within its vicinity, Ukraine, Georgia, etc. Russia believes in its rights to protect the newly independent states. Russia establishes connections with China and Iran as an attempt to become autonomous and independent again in global politics.

In another aspect of the scenario, in addition to the nation states, people express anger towards the Washington hegemony, the way that Washington uses its power without caring for people in almost every area, whether it is environment, human rights, even global security. The US approach is that we are going to rule because we got the power. US initiated the Human Rights Council in UN. But when the idea is adopted by other countries, it is the US who opposed it in the General Assembly since it realized that it could not control the council.

From the UN General Assembly voting record, it is clear that the US and Israel usually vote against the rest of the world. If there is major consensus on issues such as nuclear weapon proliferation, Bosnia and Pales-

tine, it is this powerful nation of the world and its close ally that vote against the global consensus. That the UN is not effective and has no consensus on the fate that confronts humankind is not true, it is there but the most powerful country and countries that link to it do not want it.

Another reason that the attempt to be a global empire is not working is the emergence of civil society and its opposition against unilateralism and hegemony. A clear manifestation is at the time of the Iraq war. People and world public opinion say it is unacceptable. There is great demonstration of human desire of peace and opposition to war by millions of people, including open letters and other kinds of campaign. In the UK, a coalition against wars is active. When President George Bush visited London they are able to mobilize one hundred fifty thousand people showing that people of the world are against the dominance.

The failure of global empire implies the emergence of multi-polar system. Different centers of power will emerge: China, perhaps Russia, Latin America, countries like Iran - considering its geopolitical position or South Africa. There will not be the dominance, overwhelmingly powerful, like US has been, but rather, a diffusion of power. We as the citizens of the world must seize the chance to empower ourselves. In the next few years it will become more obvious.

We should, firstly, strengthen international institutions. They have not been strong as they should be because there is a single superpower. But once we have the diffusion of power, it is easier to strengthen them. We

should change the UN General Assembly, IMF and World Bank, WTO to be more transparent and democratic. The possibility is there. Even now there is resistance against the powerful US, European Union, and Japan through the WTO. It is working because the poor countries say they have enough with them. So we have the group of 90 and the group of 20. In the diffusion of power, we are able to strengthen international law, such as the Kyoto Accord on environment, the Rome Treaty on the International Criminal Court, and the Ottawa Treaty on landmines. We as citizens of the world can campaign for that.

Secondly, there is no greater urgency than the commitment to eradicate global poverty. We should reform the international financial system which is controlled by speculative capital that allows few people with vested interest to dominate the world economy. Isn't it disgraceful that only 6-7% of the total financial transactions today connect with the productive economy? More than 90% of the remaining is speculative economy which is powerful with its daily transaction of US\$ 2-3 trillion a day. Can we reform the international financial architecture, introduce the ideas like the Tobin tax to control speculative currency? Is there something else that we can do on the global basis?

Thirdly, we can campaign against the weapons of mass destruction especially nuclear weapons. It must be a campaign that engages the energy of every soul on earth.

To establish a universal civilization

However, fighting against poverty, bringing about changes

in the global financial system and eliminating nuclear weapons, all these changes even if they do happen will not guarantee peace. They will not guarantee that humankind would be able to live in harmony.

How does one get rid of poverty, the growing gap between rich and poor, which is more serious than absolute poverty, unless one's attitude on wealth changes? To get rid of poverty in the real sense is that the attitude on wealth changes. As long as the global economic system is directed towards the accumulation and acquisition of wealth as an end in itself we cannot hope for change.

Likewise, how do we curb speculative capital unless we address the fundamental attitude on human greed and selfishness? We may be able to control the speculation of currency, but human beings still continue to speculate on something else. We now have perhaps the first civilization that sanctifies and legitimizes greed. We have turned greed and selfishness into our goal.

How can we get rid of nuclear weapons without addressing the greater questions of trust, or situation where we do not fear our neighbors, questions of dominance and hegemony, within every level of human relations, between men and women, communities and nation states?

What we need is a spiritual and moral revolution, a change of the level of our attitude now, otherwise humankind will be in danger. Ironically, we are forced to think, to look at our situation, from other perspectives because of the events that are taking place all over the world. Look at the tsunami, earthquake, typhoon or other natural ca-

lamities. They remind us of our origins and common fate. Or epidemic diseases—flu and SARS—traveling cross border so easily, it demands a collective response transcending boundaries. Look at the economic challenges and speculative capital and how its impact is total. It may happen in one country like in the 1997-1998 financial crisis began with the baht and spread all over Southeast Asia and the world. Look at the problem of terrorism and how it is a product of insecurity, a product of misguided religious teachings, but nonetheless it affects us. All these remind us of going beyond one's community, or religion to develop common values, common humanity.

For the revolution to take place, we have to reflect on our religions. As a human being in a short period of time we should understand it. The philosophies that talk about compassion, that remind us of our common humanity are our great religious traditions, not the secular tradition. Religion is the one that we connect with human beings because we share something which is very profound. It tells us that we cannot aggrandize our power and wealth. There is a point of reference that transcends us. The base of human existence is spiritual.

For many people, the profound beautiful message of our spiritual traditions sometimes are not practical because the way that religion has been manipulated. The two most obvious examples in the global arena today are firstly those who support hegemony in the name of religion, the so called Christian Right that backs George Bush and support the military conquest of the Arab world from

their theological point of view which is unchristian. Another example is persons like Osama bin Laden and others. They think that the religion wants them to kill non-combatants. According to their averted version of religion they divide the world into the believers and the infidels, the latter should be the target.

Because of the distortion of religions, many of us feel uneasy about the role of religion. But we should not allow such distortions to prevent us from the profound message. In fact because of this distortion, we should even more determine to put across these other message of aversion. We have to say that is not the teaching of religion. It should strengthen our determination to present religion as a truth. As a Muslim, I would not be swayed by attempts to present Islam as a narrow, inclusive excuse. But I should reaffirm my faith and

my commitment to a universal inclusive vision of Islam. We have to do that. In fact it is important that people with other vision of religion, the real, authentic vision, to come together and work together. This is the greatest challenge.

We have to overcome the dichotomy that exists in religions. We have to be bold enough to come together, saying that I as a Muslim have a lot more in common with a Buddhist, when it comes to protecting the environment, bridling consumerism, equitable distribution of wealth, assertive and ethical leadership, developing culture as the basis of transforming the society, emphasizing character and education. Certainly there are much more in common with people of other faiths. This is the basis of working together.

We know that in every religion, there is one universal

message. It's there in Islam. The message of Islam is totally completely universal. It blesses the entire universe.

Of course there are differences in terms of religious history, the founder, the doctrine, etc. But the difference does not mean that we should not reaffirm our common humanity. Because in the ultimate analysis it is the only thing that counts; the identity that sustains, perpetuates through time. It's our common human identity, not our ethnic or religious identity.

Let me conclude by a quote from one of the great mystical philosophers of all time. His name was known to people of all religious background Rumi the great mystic once said, "The lamp may be different, but the light will be the same"

Chandra Muzaffar
25 June 2006

A Life of Giving

This week's 2006 World AIDS Summit in Toronto meets under the shadow of one remarkable woman's efforts to champion the cause of orphans affected by AIDS around the world.

French Countess Albina du Boisvrouvray, cousin to Prince Albert of Monaco who attended King Bhumiphol Adulyadej's Royal Diamond Jubilee celebrations in Bangkok, has become the new Millennium's leading voice crystallizing world attention on the plight of distressed AIDS orphans and vulnerable children.

Whilst, there have been many champions, of children



Mr. Prida Tiasuwan, Vice Chairperson of FXB Foundation (Thailand), at the press conference on the "Living Together in Harmony" Campaign to mark the 7th May World AIDS Orphans Day.

before her, few have dramatized the issue as a global problem. And none have done it so successfully.

Her boldest and most imaginative initiative to date was the launching of World AIDS Orphans Day (WAOD) on May 7th 2002. Within five years Albina has persuaded 271 cities – New York and Washington DC included – in 38 countries to officially proclaim May 7th as World AIDS Orphans Day.

The idea behind WAOD is to demonstrate the need for a global solution to the problem of AIDS orphans and vulnerable children.

On May 7th 2006, Francois Xavier Bagnoud (FXB) Thailand Foundation also, held a press conference at Arnoma Hotel in Bangkok to commemorate WAOD and deliver supporting messages. Representatives from NGOs, local corporations, multinational corporations, the Thai – Malaysian Chamber of Commerce, the print media, radio and TV stations participated in the event.

What are we to think of this aristocratic post-modern self-appointed guardian angel of AIDS orphans?

In her early days Albina du Boisvrouvray was an extremely talented blue-blooded militant, liberated woman of the world, who became a successful writer and film producer.

She had been a freelance journalist for the *Nouvel Observateur*. Her journalistic scoop on the circumstances surrounding the death of the legendary revolutionary hero Che Guevara, was used by *L' Express* and broadcasted by French and Scandinavian television channels.

In 1970, she co-founded

Libre, a literary magazine that published the works of many famous Latin American writers who subsequently became literary icons, including Plinio Mendoza, Carlos Franqui, Octavio Paz, Claribel Allegría, Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Carlos Fuentes.

During the same overlapping period, from 1969 to 1986, she founded a film company, Albina Productions and produced 22 movies in 17 years, notably – “Les Zozos” (1972), Pascal Thomas’ first movie, “Police Python (1975) by Alain Corneau, “L’important c’est d’aimer (1975) by Andrzej Zulawski and “Fort Saganne (1984) by Alain Corneau.

In 1985, she was made “Chevalier des Arts et Lettres” and became the first film producer to be awarded France’s coveted “L’ Ordre National du Merite.”

Albina was not an artist who had to struggle against poverty like Dostoyevsky or Charles Dickens. She was also a reputable businesswoman in her own right. Since 1980 she has been running her own family business empire as Chairperson of SEGH, a real estate and hotel properties group.

Until then life had smiled on Albina. Wealth, success and fame had naturally attached themselves to her like second nature. But her life was about to change drastically.

Suddenly, her life was shattered by the death of her only child, Francois-Xavier Bagnoud, from her marriage with her Swiss husband Bruno Bagnoud, in a flying accident during a rescue mission over Mali in 1986.

Inconsolably, saddened by her loss she could not continue living the life she used to. She

sold her film producing company and most of her personal assets and went away with Bernard Kouchner of *Medicins du Monde* on a humanitarian mission to Lebanon.

She said: “I sold three quarters of my family inheritance, jewels, paintings and real property. The proceeds came close to US\$100 million.”

Half the proceeds she donated to charitable causes that her late son Francois was passionate about. The second half of the proceeds, close to US\$60 million, was used to found the Swiss based, Association Francois Xavier Bagnoud (AFXB), in 1989 to support programs dedicated to AIDS orphans around the world.

Albina extended AFXB’s geographical reach into South-east Asia in 1990.

She started with shelter and support activities for abandoned HIV/AIDS infected babies in Northern Thailand, where the AIDS epidemic which began in the ‘80s, hit hardest. With the collaboration of Child Rights activist Sanpasit Koompraphant of the Foundation for Children and *Medicins Sans Frontieres* (MSF), Albina established 3 rehabilitation homes and offered a program of social, psychological and professional reintegration for young Myanmar women rescued from the sex trade in Thailand.

Albina visited Thailand in late 1992 and established a project to care for abandoned HIV/AIDS infected babies and orphans by setting up four FXB Houses in Chiangmai in collaboration with, the locally based, Support the Children Foundation. The FXB Houses are still operating although they are now fully self-supporting.

Through the good offices of the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), Albina joined an ecumenical effort, in collaboration with an innovative Buddhist monk, Phra Alongkot to initiate an AIDS hospice in Central Thailand. Wat Prabat Namphu, in Lopburi Province, has become a famous temple of last resort for AIDS victims.

At the temple-hospice professional, compassionate attention is combined with Buddhist meditation and contemplation to provide spiritual relief from the suffering of living with AIDS.

The hospice is currently run by a local foundation.

On July 12th 2004, Countess Albina du Boisvrouvray received the prestigious Thai Komol Keemthong Foundation Award of Outstanding Personality for the year 2004. The award was given in appreciation for her great contributions to Thailand and Myanmar, in the field of protection of children's and women's rights, education, vocational training, support of HIV/AIDS infected children and their families.

On the 75th Anniversary of diplomatic relations, between

Thailand and Switzerland, on May 4th 2006, The Embassy of Switzerland, in Bangkok, made a generous contribution to FXB Thailand Foundation in support of AFXB's good work on behalf of women, children and orphans affected by HIV/AIDS and the Asian Tsunami of 2005, in Thailand.

Countess Albina du Boisvrouvray is the Chairperson of the Swiss based NGO, AFXB International, and lives in Paris.

Jeffery Sng
14/8/06

NEW PARADIGMS IN DEVELOPMENT

Gross National Happiness in the Greater Mekong Sub-region

Minimizing desire has been the path towards life satisfaction in the East by tradition. But this characteristic has been overgrown by greed as a central cultural value, embedded in American lifestyles. While the trend in Europe to resort to Eastern values and minimize desire is now the rationale towards a more sustainable economy.

This was the description Mr. Rae Kwon Chung, Director Environment and Development Division of UNESCAP (the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia and Pacific) presented to the participants at the conference *New Paradigms in Development: Gross National Happiness in the Greater Mekong Sub-region*. The first day of the conference was organized as an overcrowded public meeting in Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

The following days of the three-day conference the core



participants from countries bordering the Mekong River (Tibet, China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam) together with a delegation from Bhutan proceeded to Wongsanit Ashram. Here Sulak Sivaraksa, founder of Wongsanit Ashram, explained how cultural patterns in Asia could get uprooted, and now are promoting the opposite of their traditional core values. In a dramatic historic overview Ajarn Sulak evoked the colonial past in which European countries violently conquered the greater

part of the world. In North-America the indigenous population was nearly extinguished. Enormous numbers of African people were dislocated in order to serve as slaves. For centuries most parts of Asia were under European rule. How could it happen that the smallest continent suppressed the rest of the world? Ajarn Sulak points at the dominance of reason over spirituality as the force behind colonialism. Once this paradigm shift was copied in Asia by Japan, it became the rationale of Japanese im-

perialism.

After the Second World War colonialism had to be abandoned. The USA, followed by the world community, initiated *development* but, according to Ajarn Sulak, it turned out to be not more than a substitute of imperialism. In addition to political mega-forces, corporate empires are now ruling the world, *development* is used to cover up the real motives of political empires and multi-national corporations: accelerating consumption and accumulation of wealth at the expense of the poor and middle classes, the environment and cultural integrity.

Venerable Dhammananda, previously lecturer at Thammasat University and today a pioneering Buddhist bhikkuni in Thailand, explained that happiness is a multi-dimensional phenomenon: it manifests itself at various levels (including down to earth stages of livelihood and security) and in several degrees. In Buddhism *Nibbana* is the ultimate state of happiness.

It is not a simple task to counter the present wealth driven paradigm and place happiness at the centre of development.

However, that is the message brought from Bhutan. Gross National Happiness represents the fundamental shift from economic development directed by Gross National (or domestic) Product or GDP – irrespective of the quality of the production and its side effects – towards spiritual fulfillment.

This message from one of the poorest countries of the world (according to conventional standards), squeezed in between the new economic empires of China and India, represents one of the major challenges confronting the present economic, political and religious leadership in the world.

Karma Ura, Director of the Center for Bhutan Studies (CBS), keeps his calm under this expectation.

Although Bhutan is as big as Switzerland the size of its population is less than 1 million citizens. His office CBS is a small one and Gross National Happiness is only one of its research areas. Karma Ura explains that operationalizing Gross National Happiness goes parallel with the introduction of democracy in Bhutan in 2008. A system of Gross National Happiness indicators will back up democratic decision making at village level and in the national parliament. After the monarchy was installed in 1907 and the more recent introduction of decentralization by the present King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutan is now to follow the democracy bandwagon. Feudalism, traditional volunteerism and consensus will be replaced and/or complemented by vote counting and constitutional monarchy. The new national decision making system will be backed up by permanent research based on a great diversity of indicators for Gross National Happiness. The research methodology is in the making and due to be ready for implementation in 2008.

“Happiness results in longer life, creative impulses in the economy, generosity and cooperation. Happiness is not an individual quality, it is a public good” said Karma Ura. “Growth of GDP, once a certain point of right livelihood has been achieved, does not lead to increased life satisfaction”. This point was confirmed by Prof. Takayoshi Kusago from Osaka University who compared GDP growth with parallel increase of suicide occurrence in Japan.

The Mekong countries are

interesting partners for Bhutan as all, except China, are small, poor and exceptional in terms of political systems. Independent persons like Sombath Somphone, Magsaysay Award recipient (the ‘Asian Nobel prize’) from Laos and Saboi Jum, Kachin state in Burma, share the search for creative margins in their exceptional situations towards paradigm shift. Thailand, of all Mekong countries, has adopted to the highest degree the American model. But it harbours strong ‘alternative movements’ and grassroots that preserve local wisdom.

Young academics from China like Dr. Guo Peiyuan share the concern regarding the Tibetan plateau where three major Asian rivers spring, including the Mekong River. Climate change could be disastrous for the sources of these rivers as well as the construction of dams in Yunnan province, China, without proper consideration of downstream implications.

Not only does Gross National Happiness point at possible new directions for development in the region, it also represents a challenge to cultural integrity all over the world. The most essential pillar of Gross National Happiness is the promotion of culture. The culture of Bhutan is still founded on ancient traditions and the sacred lineages constituting Mahayana Buddhism. But as everywhere in the world irrespective of culture or religion, the pressure of globalization through commercial media penetration of daily life is affecting in particular the younger generation.

“We cannot go back to the past” according to Ajarn Sulak “but we can bring the past to the present”

Hans van Willenswaard

The Monarch and the Constitution

During the 50th anniversary celebrations of His Majesty the King's accession to the throne, I was invited to give a speech entitled "The Monarchy and the Future of Siam" to commemorate that auspicious occasion. On this coming 9th June 2006, we'll celebrate the king's Diamond Jubilee. I shall therefore deliver the closing remarks today, which also happens to mark the anniversary of the king's marriage.

The Thai words for "monarchy" (*sathaban pramahakasat*) and "constitution" (*rathamanoon*) bear the traces of foreign origination. The word *sathaban* is a fairly recent construction while the word *rathamanoon* made its appearance after the 1932 revolution. During the Meiji era, Japan promulgated the constitution in 1879 in order to exhibit its modernity. It was the first Asian country to do so. The Meiji constitution fully declared the absolutist nature of the country. The emperor was made sacred and divine, beyond reproach or criticism. The royal family was said to originate from the sun goddess. People must be willing to sacrifice their lives, for the emperor's war. In other words, the constitution used the monarchy to oppress the citizens of Japan as well of other countries—which the Japanese army invaded such as China, Korea, and Thailand during WWII. When Japan was defeated in WWII—60 years ago—the American military occupiers, as the victor, rewrote its constitution. The monarchy lost its sacredness. The emperor became an ordinary person who could be criticized and who is under the constitution and other

laws—like all Japanese.

The Meiji era coincided with the reign of King Rama V. The Siamese king wanted the monarchy to be the core of absolutism. This was also the political situation in Europe, such as in England, Prussia, Russia, and the Holy Roman Empire in Austria. European Absolutism was however in the twilight of its power, but the Siamese ruling elites couldn't grasp this fact.

King Rama V wanted to be an absolutist monarch like his European counterparts. He wanted to be respected by *farangs*. He did not want to be like other absolutist monarchs in Asia (with the exception of Japan) whose kingdoms lost their independence and sovereignty such as in Burma and Vietnam or like the emperor of China who did not succeed in adapting to modernity. He consulted with Prince Prisdang who was his contemporary and whom he felt was more modern in part because the latter was educated from abroad—while King Rama V wasn't. Therefore, the king believed that Prince Prisdang would give him good advice on how to transform the status of the Thai monarch so as to be respected by civilized nations in the world. He did not want to be seen as inferior to the European monarchs. If Siam had a legitimate form of government, the king reasoned, it would be able to escape from being colonized.

Prince Prisdang made a big blunder by disseminating the king's query as well as many important official documents pertaining to the Thai monarchy to a wider circle. As a result, several

government officials had the opportunity to express their views. They wanted to have a constitution in which the power of the king is clearly limited and reduced. This political position emerged 3 years prior to the Meiji constitution.

The king's reply letter to Prince Prisdang and others clearly expresses the view that he opposed the constitution or any limitation of royal power—even though England had started serious political reforms since 1832. Although England has no written constitution, that year clearly marked the reduction of royal power and that of the nobility. The House of Commons increasingly gained more importance vis-a-vis the House of Lords. But the Siamese ruling elites weren't aware of this transition, except for the few who petitioned the king in 1885. In Siam, it seems that only Prince Bichitpreechakorn who openly supported the promulgation of a constitution that circumscribes the royal power along democratic lines. (Here I am excluding commoners like Tianwan.) On the other hand, Prince Devawongse Varoprakorn, reflecting the king's stance, fully supported absolutism.

Kullada Kesboonchoo Mead has clearly narrated the rise and decline of Thai absolutism in her book of the same name. Therefore, I will not retell it. Benjamin Batson has also recounted well the final years of absolutism in *The End of Absolute Monarchy in Siam*, which has been translated into the Thai language.

II

As mentioned earlier, when talking about the monarchy and the constitution, we must trace them to the thoughts of *farangs*. For example, the Meiji Constitution emulated *farangs* in terms of absolutism combined with the military and political power like Germany at the time. Of course, this was done at the expense of liberty. The Japanese ruling elites argued that such form of government meant the restoration of royal power, transferring it from the shogun to the emperor. Various rituals and ceremonies were invented to flaunt the grandiosity of the monarchy—similar to those of European monarchs.

Despite looking confident and majestic, the emperor was in reality weak. The succeeding Taisho emperor was insane. And the Showa emperor was embroiled in numerous wicked things, politically and militarily, prior to WWII till Japan's defeat in it. In the wake of WWII, had the Americans not protected the emperor, he would have been removed from power or put on trial as a war criminal. Ever since the Meiji constitution, the monarchy served violence for three reigns—politically, militarily, economically (e.g., capitalism), and even scientifically (in the name of modernity, progress, and scientism). All these meant serving injustice.

Compared to the Japanese monarchy the Siamese monarchy at least since the Fourth Reign served justice more than injustice. During the Meiji era, Buddhism was destroyed in Japan and the new ruling elites wanted to use violence like *farangs* and like shoguns. On the contrary, the

Thai ruling elites relied on Buddhism and reconciliation as core values. Hence, King Rama IV stated on his coronation day thus: "I will rule with justice for the prosperity of the Siamese people." This is not merely rhetoric for it derived from the substance of Buddhism, which is found in the Ten Royal Virtues* and the Duties of a Great Ruler. The latter states as follows:

1. Upholding the supremacy of the law of truth and righteousness and providing the right watch (ward and protection)
2. Making sure that no wrongdoing prevail in the kingdom
3. Enabling the giving and distributing of wealth to the poor
4. Having virtuous counselors and seeking after greater virtue

Can we see the Ten Royal Virtues and the Duties of a Great Ruler as forming the Buddhist constitution that has long existed with the monarchy? (Of course, the Thai monarchy in the past also comprised of Brahmic elements.)

According to the "Brahmic Constitution" the king upholds justice through the use of royal power. In other words, the king can issue punishment. But if the punishment is too severe or seen as arising from the king's personal prejudice, then he will be seen as not acting according to the royal virtue. The same logic applies if he's too lenient. Thus, in the exercise of royal power the king must be just and impartial. The king must uphold the art of moral government as well as moral discourse. If he fails to act

accordingly, he may be removed from power.

This art of moral government, which derived from Brahmanism, served as our original constitution. King Rama I ordered the mural painting of *Ramakian* at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha to reaffirm his commitment to being a just king: Rama serves as the role model. And all the kings of the Chakkri Dynasty are named Rama. In his version of *Ramakian* Rama I compares the kingdom's inhabitants to weapons, which are more powerful than the kingdom itself. The kingdom is an organic body. The heart is akin to the king while the body is the people. Both exist in harmony. If they are severed, the kingdom will disintegrate.

On the Buddhist side, King Rama IV stated that since he was invited to the throne by those in powers, he would rule justly for the prosperity of the people. He would not act arbitrarily but would consult his senior ministers before embarking on important tasks. Should he fail to rule justly, he insisted that he could be legitimately removed.

Several Buddhist stories clearly show that if the king acts unjustly, he will be challenged by extra-monarchical power. For instance, King Samon acts unjustly toward Phra Sang Negrito, seeing the latter as uncultivated and barbaric. Therefore, God Indra has to intervene to settle the case. Or in the Vessantara Jataka, although the prince is just, the people see him as too generous. Therefore, they mobilized to drive him away from the kingdom.

In Buddhism, the monarch is the representative of the kingdom

* 1) giving; 2) good conduct; 3) renunciation; 4) understanding; 5) energy; 6) endurance; 7) truthfulness; 8) resolution; 9) loving kindness; and 10) equanimity.

or a mechanism of government based on power. On the other hand, the Sangha represents the Wheel of Dhamma, which advises the state on how to use power wisely and justly. If the Sangha upholds moral duties and is knowledgeable of world affairs (e.g., economics, politics, etc.), then it will help check and balance or “brake” the power of the state or the sovereign. During the time of King Narasuan, Somdej Vanarat of Wat Pakaew admonished the king not to kill loyal generals. Or the cases of the Supreme Patriarch, Phra Phimontham, and Phra Buddhacharn who were incarcerated by the king of Thonburi, contributing to the latter’s subsequent downfall. Or the case of Somdej Toh of Wat Rakang who lit his lamp in midday and walked straight into the residence of the Regent to King Rama V in order to warn him to exercise power mindfully—not beyond the prerogatives of the young monarch.

III

The Thai triad of Nation, Religion, and King was invented during the Sixth Reign. It was based on the English God, King, and Country. England used these three words to indoctrinate its people, making them willing to sacrifice their lives for their country. *Farangs* had engaged in numerous religious wars in the past—though they believed in the same God. European kings who fought one another (e.g., Germany and England) were also close relatives. And in the belligerent states, capitalists made enormous profits from the war.

Christmas Humphreys converted to Buddhism and served as the first president of the Buddhist Society in England. He became a Buddhist because he believed

that the government deluded his brother to die for God, King, and Country during WWI.

Perhaps, we need to reinterpret “nation” not to mean a group of people who speak the same language, who live in the same territory, or who share the same ethnicity or nationality (which is illusionary) but to mean everyone who is alive and who is confronting happiness as well as suffering, then we will be supportive of one another and will be willing to serve those who are exploited and lack opportunity even though they belong to different nationalities, ethnicities, etc.

Religion does not mean that ours is the best or that since we are the majority in the land, our religion will be the national religion. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa warned us not to led astray by religions or -isms that promote nationalism, militarism, capitalism, and so on. Rather, we should see our friends’ religions as not inferior to ours and as deserving respect. Even those who don’t have religion deserve our respect. We can all cooperate to overcome greed, hatred, and delusion as manifested in capitalism, militarism, and scientism.

The king may be seen as a *deva* who isn’t sacred. In fact, ordinary people can also be *deva* if they uphold divine virtues namely, having moral shame and moral fear. Moreover, if the king practices the Ten Royal Virtues and the Duties of a Great Ruler, the people will look upon him as a role model. The present king clearly stated that he is an ordinary human being who can say and do incorrect things. Hence, if citizens are loyal they should criticize him.

The king and the monarchy shouldn’t be used as a tool to attack others, to foster egoism, or

to portray how a fervent devotee of Nation, Religion, and King one is. The king also stated that any lese majeste case filed will negatively impact him. He once declared, “If a royal opinion cannot be challenged, then there’s no way for the Thai country to progress.”

Lamentably, those who are acting as a king above the king are charging others with lese majeste as if they haven’t listened to the royal speeches. The Asian Human Rights Commission, for instance, has protested the charge of lese majeste filed against the editor of *Fah Diew Kun*. Several books on or mentioning about the king have been banned from the kingdom, notably: *The Devil’s Discus* by Rayne Kruger (1964), *The Revolutionary King* by William Stevenson (1999), and most recently *The King Never Smiles* by Paul M. Handley (2006). Aren’t these actions making a mockery of the country? Aren’t they contradicting the king’s message? Can books really be banned from the kingdom in this day and age?

Although the Constitution qua the highest law has existed in the kingdom since 1932, we still don’t understand its substance; that is, the Constitution must check and balance the state power by making it transparent and accountable. With contempt for justice and righteousness, we have ripped apart many constitutions. Worse, we’ve destroyed the Constitution citing the protection of the monarchy as the pretext. Within this context, it seems as if the monarchy is antithetical to the Constitution, to justice. Some military dictators deviously tried to make the monarchy a sacred institution beyond criticism. This smacks of black magic, which numbs the mind. Buddhism,

however, is the art of being awakened based on nonviolence. This is at the core of morality, or the normal state of being, individually as well as collectively.

The monarchy and the Constitution must therefore nourish one another for morality, for the normal state of being in society; that is, to overcome greed in the forms of capitalism and TNCs as well as imperialism. Put another way, capitalism and militarism (greed and hatred) have joined hands, strengthening each, additionally employing the tactics of delusion.

The monarchy can help awaken us from these injustices. It can be seen as divine only if it adheres to the divine virtue. And it must walk alongside the Constitution, which cultivates justice through accountability and transparency, which entails openness to criticism.

Against the backdrop of imperialism, transnational capitalism, and terrorism in the globalizing world, if we know how to transform the monarchy into a morally courageous institution, we won't have to kowtow to these illegitimate forces. The monarchy will be able to serve as one of our bulwarks. The monarchy along with the Constitution will thus act as the Wheel of Dhamma, guiding the kingdom away from global capitalism and imperialism. The old Wheel of Dhamma, which was founded on the yellow robes, has long been defunct. It no longer serves as a dhammic leader. On the contrary, it has been servile to the monarchy and to consumerism. A morally courageous monarchy will serve as an umbrella for the people, turning their attention to the Sangha and perhaps rejuvenating the Buddhist Council. As a result, the Sangha may rely on the

Dhamma-Vinaya as its Constitution and will cooperate with the monarchy and morally courageous citizens to guide the kingdom away from contemporary forms of ignorance.

I hereby reaffirm the standpoint I made one decade ago: Any monarchy that is democratic, possesses limited power, and is mindful of the ethical norms in the contemporary world will treat the people as the ruler of the land, even if they are fallible. The monarchy will thus continue to exist under the Constitution. But if the monarchy is arrogant and hard-boiled, works closely with the military, conceitedly stands above the citizens, looks down on the people, and dislikes progressive intellectuals (who again are all fallible), royal power will be used to obstruct changes, thereby jeopardizing the viability of the monarchy. The monarchy will be sowing the seeds of its own destruction. Even the great Austrian, German, Russian, and Ottoman empires had crumbled.

I'd like to add one more thing. If the monarchy maintains a safe distance from TNCs and global capitalism its integrity will also be strengthened. I will end my address today with the memorable words of King Rama V. In a letter to his crown prince, he writes: "Being a king isn't

about being the-haves, about taking advantage of others arbitrarily, about being able to take revenge on a hated person, and about eating and resting well. If you want the latter, there are two ways [to achieve it]: be a monk or a really wealthy person. A king has to work hard and endures happiness and suffering, endures the love and the hatred that emerges spontaneously in the mind, and lacks laziness. The only benefit the king will reap is the recognition after his death that he is the protector of the family line and of the citizens from suffering. In power, the king must heed these two points more than other issues. If one has not made up one's mind thus, I don't see how the kingdom can be protected."

The present king has conducted himself along these lines. As for the monarchy, if we have a good Constitution and morally courageous individuals, no matter who's the future ruler, we'll be able to protect the monarchy—as King Rama V wanted.

A public lecture at
Thammasat University
28th April 2006



21st August 2006, Sulak Sivaraksa reported himself to the police after he received an arrest warrant on charges of lese majesty. His lawyer was Mr Somchai Homlaor, president of the Human Rights Committee of the Lawyer's Council of Thailand. The charge resulted from Sulak's interview in *Fah Diew Kun*, a Thai journal, in October 2005.

The police granted him bail at baht 300,000 and referred the case to the Public Prosecutors on 5th September.

Reflections on the Diamond Jubilee of H.M. the King's Accession to the Throne

Officially, the royal celebrations were organized "on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of His Majesty the King's accession to the throne." All the domestic media—radio, television, newspapers, magazines, etc.—showered praises on the king. Any form of criticism was conspicuous by its absence. How can the kingdom be "the land of the free"? Its democratic credentials are also held in suspect, especially when the head of government (the caretaker prime minister) has lost the legitimacy to rule in the eyes of the public. The lower house of Parliament no longer exists, but there's still the President of Parliament, who is the President of the Senate—a senate which has completed its term but is still working in its capacity as caretaker. At least the President of the Supreme Court is 'real'.

As he was called to the Bar abroad (and one who has faced 3 trials in the Thai courts, and perhaps more to come), the writer wishes to use the Latin adage *cui bono* vis-à-vis the royal celebrations. *Cui bono* may be translated as "good for whom?" or "who benefits?"

At first sight, we can say that the beneficiaries of the royal celebrations are the people wearing yellow shirts who gathered at the Royal Plaza to see the king appear on the balcony of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall. Or the huge crowds that gathered along the riverbanks of the Chao Phya River to witness the Royal Barge Procession. Or those who attended the royal festivities that were organized in numerous

provinces. It wouldn't be incorrect to say that they benefited from the five-day royal event. But did we see that it was relatively easy for the mass media to stimulate and mobilize the people? (Here the World Cup serves as another good example.) The king was transformed into some sort of a superstar, a superstar who also possesses divine or magical power. Lady Diana underwent a similar transformation after her death.

Unlike a president, a king is often shrouded in mystery or myth. If we are unable to de-mythologize this fact, we'll be living with things we don't understand, believing that they exert mystical influences on our lives (for good or ill), and hence we must prostrate on the floor before them. Phra Siam Devadhiraj was constructed, and so was the whole cult of King Rama V nowadays. King Rama IV created the former, the latter was fabricated by a movie star who contended that he is the medium of the deceased monarch. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat engineered the 'divinity' of the present monarch; it was probably the brainchild of Luang Wichit Wathakan. Hence it was a product of a dictatorial and unaccountable power combined with the lack of moral courage on the part of the Thai mass media and mainstream education. The king's status as an 'appointed divine being' (*sammatti deva*) according to Buddhism—as an ordinary person who has a higher status than others simply in terms of being in a position to rule over them—has thereby been trans-

formed into a "divine king" (*deva raja*) according to Brahmanism. This requires the people to prostrate on the floor in the presence of the king. The people are treated as dusts that happen to be in the kingdom. They can never be equal to the king or to the members of the royal family. But Westerners or foreigners in general are deemed as equal to the Thai royals. All these despite the fact that the 24 June 1932 revolution had 'overturned' the land, making citizens the actual masters of the land. It was the first time in the kingdom's history that the 'masters' were brought down to their proper position, to be on an equal par with the ordinary people. But this ethos evaporated in 1957-58.

These are myths that were constructed to make people believe in or rather fear them. In the past, the people in the West believed in God. In the past, many Thais feared ghosts, demons and spirits—many still do so now. Many Thais still believe in *royal power* which is often tied to the supernatural. For instance, many believe in the magical power of King Narae-suan. No one, however, has asked whether he was courageous or actually reckless and foolhardy. No one has wondered why he irrationally sentenced his generals and soldiers to death simply because they didn't meet his troops on time in the battlefield.

As for the yellow shirts, many voluntarily bought them even though they had to dig deep into their pockets. Many could barely afford the yellow shirts. Were they actually 'fooled' by

nationalism and royalism via the mass media to buy the yellow shirts? Did we care about asking those who bought or wore the yellow shirts involuntarily?

Many hired buses from the provinces to attend the celebrations in Bangkok. These buses stopped and parked at the peripheries of Bangkok. They then had to ride on public transportation to get into the heart of the city. All these cost money. When they saw the king (appearing on the balcony of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall), tears streamed down their faces. *Cui bono*. The crowds? They got what they were looking for, right? But we can further ask: What long-term benefits would they get in return? The same can be said about the poor in the Northeastern region of the kingdom who donated money and gold to the Bank of Thailand via Luangta Maha Bua. They were elated to make merits by donating money. But they remain poor, and some even got into debt just because they wanted to make donations.

A foreign article opines that those who attended the royal celebrations were no different from the masses attending the rallies of the North Korean leader. No one knows who attended the rallies out of love or fear. They might have been forced to attend them. As for the Thai case, I don't think anyone was forced to attend the royal celebrations—at least on this occasion. And the Thai kingdom is not a dictatorship like North Korea or China. But anyone who has read Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* will understand the point I am trying to make. We must not forget that when Chairman Mao was alive, he was also monumentalized. Many even deemed him greater than Chinese

emperors in the past. Many were willing to die for him. They loved and cherished him, and hailed him to live on for tens of thousands of years.

The royal speech delivered from the balcony of the Ananta Samakhom Throne Hall on 9 June 2006 is thoughtful but difficult to practice.

Perhaps we have forgotten that on this very same day 60 years ago, Pridi Banomyong as prime minister nominated the present king's name to the throne. This was the very same day that King Rama VIII was found dead from gunshot wounds in his chamber. But Pridi ultimately was accused of a crime that he did not commit, of planning the regicide. This is also a myth. There has yet to be an official account of the death of King Rama VIII. (During the royal festivities, the BBC alone declared that King Rama VIII was assassinated.)

When the king left the balcony of the Throne Hall that morning, some said they saw tears from his eyes because he was deeply touched by the people's show of respect and loyalty. Or was he really saddened by the death of his brother which occurred on that very day sixty years ago? No one knows.

When Pridi was Regent to King Rama VIII he periodically invited Bhikkhu Buddhadasa (who was then 34 years old and had already proclaimed himself the servant of the Buddha for ten years) to the Ta Chang Residence for religious discussion. In all, Bhikkhu Buddhadasa visited the Residence 5 times; each discussion lasted approximately 3 hours. The present king however has never engaged in a religious discussion with Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. (The king had only listened to Bhikkhu Buddhadasa's sermon when the latter was abbot

of Wat Phra Baromtat at Chaiya district. Nevertheless, the king has had many religious conversations with several renowned monks.) Bhikkhu Buddhadasa recorded an interesting encounter with Pridi thus:

Thursday, 18 June 1942

The Regent's residence....

The first sentence of the conversation appears to be like the words of a sage: that is, the Buddha taught us not to believe things simply because we have heard them, even if they are his words. This means that the Buddha gives us the opportunity to reflect and inquire with full freedom. Therefore, we must ask questions and keep trying to understand each other until there's sufficient reason to believe [one another].

The Regent wants the poor to have confidence, to feel that it is possible for them to be as happy as the haves. This can be achieved through contentment according to the principles of Buddhism. He wants [me] to compose a song that captures the core of Buddhism and a song that will make the listener courageous enough to seek happiness by mitigating desires or cravings, highlighting desires that are the greatest enemy.

We must not forget that today cravings come in the forms of capitalism, consumerism, and militarism.

Unfortunately, Pridi was forced into exile as a result of the mysterious death of King Rama VIII. We should see it as a major tragedy for Siam. However, the royal celebrations overlooked this point. Hence, how could they be meaningful?

As long as the truth is not confronted, half-truths and hypocracies will dominate and proliferate in the kingdom, making it difficult to find morally

courageous individuals.

II

The king's Diamond Jubilee was attended by 13 monarchs, head of states and 12 representatives. In all they represented 25 countries. At a glance, this looks impressive. But in how many of these states will the monarchy actually survive into the future? We should ponder out loud to what extent the monarchy must change in order to adapt to present realities.

Another important question is how much did the whole event cost? Who paid for it? The citizens who got nothing substantial out of it aside from being able to exclaim "long live the king" several times during the course of the event? *Cui bono*. The inescapable answer is the Thai monarch, the longest reigning monarch in the world at present. But has the standard of living of his citizens improved noticeably during his 60-year reign? Did rain fall seasonally? Is the royal-initiated artificial rain merely a myth? Has the gap between the rich and the poor widened? Has the natural environment deteriorated or has there been environmental balance? What about the state of the culture and the arts? Of course, these questions concern the government more than the monarch. But are the royal initiated projects really beneficial to the people? These are questions that should be openly and widely discussed. We should further ask whether or not the Crown Property Bureau has been sufficiently transparent and accountable in its actions. It has made several shady deals with major corporations, and has driven long-term tenants from their lands in order to construct a building for a corporation. Are these ethical? The funny thing is

that the director of the Bureau organized a seminar on the king's sufficiency economy, in which one of the participants was CP, the giant business conglomerate. How much profit did CP reap by selling all those yellow shirts?

I truly sympathize with the king. He had to torment his body throughout the course of the festivities. The whole event was completely outdated. He had to be fully and officially dressed like *farangs*, had to wear something that is unsuitable to the climate of the kingdom. Now the king is already very old. And did we only have the Royal Barge Procession to flaunt to the royal guests?

Chemical-free foods were served to the royal guests during the event. Vegetables served came from the royal initiated projects. But fish and meats were imported from abroad. And they are very expensive. It is also strange that no Thai food was served. All things considered, it is as if time has stood still: the 2006 royal gathering is similar to the ones held in the Fifth and Sixth Reigns.

It must also be pointed out that the Royal Family of Saudi Arabia did not send anyone to attend the celebrations. Have we forgotten the case of the diamonds stolen by a Thai from a Saudi Arabian Prince, and the whole messy affair that followed? The Thai court has still not made its verdict in this case. We can further ask how many of the monarchies attending the festivities are actually absolutist. How many are democratic and secular? To what extent are these monarchies different from ours? What about the Crown Prince of Bhutan who is much admired by the local media? How democratic is his kingdom? The model of Gross National Happiness in

that kingdom directly challenges that of Gross National Product advocated by mainstream economic institutions. But no one seemed to have mentioned this fact.

The king's Diamond Jubilee coincided with the centenary of Bhikkhu Buddhadasa. Bhikkhu Buddhadasa once remarked that Buddhist sermons should touch upon Dhammic essence and virtues that are relevant and beneficial to contemporary society. Music can also play an important role during a ceremony. Recall the conversation that Bhikkhu Buddhadasa had with Pridi, which is cited above.

I fear that adapting religious ceremonies to present realities is already terribly difficult. It will be even more difficult to reform the Sangha, emancipating it from consumerism and absolutism.

As for the Thai government (in particular the premier and the deputy prime minister who years to be the next UN Secretary General) the lavish use of tax payers' money to organize the festivities directly benefited it. But soon after the festivities, ill fate may befall on it. We have to wait and see.

III

From a Buddhist perspective, the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee is like worshipping the king through material gifts. It was a costly and extravagant event. A lot of money was wasted. Monks with close connection to the government had also wasted a lot of tax payers' money by organizing an international event to celebrate Vesakh day. (It was also on Vesakh day in 1932 that Phra Ngerm Indapanyo proclaimed himself the servant of the Buddha.) But that international event completely lacked the ethos befitting the servants or

disciples of the Buddha. Rather it reflected the arrogance of the organizers, and therefore it lacked Dhammic substance—like the event the government organized a month later.

If the organizers of the royal event (most of them lacked vision and are morally half-baked and enamored with outdated ceremonies) were serious about venerating the king, we would see major attempts to openly discuss the following points.

1. To venerate the monarch, we must develop ways to preserve the monarchy (at least for another 60 years); that is, reforming and adapting it according to democratic principles. In other words, the monarchy must be rendered compatible to contemporary realities. It must not be reducible to a single individual.
2. To venerate the monarch appropriately, we must find ways to make the lives of citizens prosperous and peaceful. At the very least, the problems in the three southernmost provinces must be tackled seriously and nonviolently. Thus far there have only been reports and suggestions from the National Reconciliation Commission, and no serious implementation.
3. There should be greater pluralism within and between the different regions of the kingdom. They should be given a greater hand in determining themselves, politically, economically, and culturally. This calls for decentralization and democratization. Power should not be monopolized by a single individual or political party. Things must be made more accountable and transparent

and less hierarchical in both the secular and the religious domains.

4. Education should be liberated from government domination. So far it has been about following the mainstream of the West. This has made the people feel inferior and made them vulnerable to capitalist domination. Market values have penetrated and dominated every domain. The people are obsessed about climbing the socioeconomic ladder at the expense of one another. This leaves violent structures intact. Education should nurture the creation of *kalyanamitta*. Teachers and students should learn from one another and from nature in order to confront the realities of social suffering and to find ways to overcome them. In other words, cravings must be mitigated. (Recall the words of the Regent to King Rama VIII.) There should be moral training, which fosters normality at the individual and collective levels. There should be mental training, which creates mindfulness, facilitates the fusion of the mind and the heart, and provides the necessary conditions for the emergence of wisdom or the ability to see things as they are—in nature, society, structures, etc. Wisdom is necessary to confront and overcome structural violence, for instance. Wisdom is necessary for the liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion, and for the understanding of goodness, beauty, and truth.
5. To realize all these, the focus should be on the new generation as well as the margi-

nalized and the exploited in the kingdom—women, migrants, ethnic minorities, the poor, etc. Structural violence should be dismantled by and for them. Everyone should have human rights and full human dignity.

6. With international cooperation, the Kingdom of Bhutan has come up with the Gross National Happiness program. Likewise, on this auspicious occasion, the Thai Kingdom should galvanize international cooperation to find alternatives to empire, neoliberal capitalism, and monoculturalism. Once again, we should heed the words of Pridi who believed that it is possible for "*the poor to have confidence, to feel... as happy as the haves. This can be achieved through contentment according to the principles of Buddhism.*" Pridi's proposal transcends Buddhism. It is pertinent to everyone. It entails returning to the core of the sufficiency economy advocated by the king. Needless to say, it is not enough to pay lip service to the proposal. It must be seriously practiced. Corrupt politicians who exploit the people and devastate the natural environment must be brought to justice, and TNCs must be tamed. Once the powers-that-be are contained, they may take part in the practices of meaningful veneration outlined above. If not, they will be like the Evil One, using money and power as their vehicle to destroy goodness, beauty, and truth.



No Muffling This Bold Old Man

AMID all that is ailing Thai society now, Sulak Sivaraksa stands out as its voice of conscience.

He seems like a ray of light, albeit too glaring sometimes, that keeps the moral compass intact.

At 73, he is still viewed by most people as one of Thailand's more outspoken and respected social activists and scholars.

Here's a man who has been twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize; a man whom Thaksin Shinawatra, who usually does not hold his tongue against his critics, has not retaliated at all against despite Sulak's constant attacks of him.

"He has not criticised me publicly. Not even privately, according to those from within his circle," Sulak said in an interview.

Mind you, he has stinging remarks of Thaksin, even calling him a dog at one point.

"People know that I have no political aspiration. Even if I had wanted to be a prime minister, I would not have become one," he said, laughing.

Sulak, according to a friend of his who has known him for decades, has deep moral integrity but no personal agenda, no desire for material benefits.

"He is inspired by Gandhi and the Dalai Lama is one of the many international figures who know him well," said this friend.

During the interview, Sulak did not hold back his views about the way Buddhism was being practised in Thailand.

He once wrote that "simply performing the outer rituals of any tradition has little value if it is not accompanied by personal transformation".

To him, the kingdom has enough temples, so more money should be spent on training monks. As a young boy, Sulak attended two Christian schools before entering monkhood for a while. "I thrived on it. I would have stayed on if my father had not talked me out of it. He asked me: what happens if you fall in love?" Sulak recalled. (He has three children and his wife runs a publishing house.)

He described his father as his very first friend, so the teen-aged Sulak was devastated when he died at 43 of cancer.

Sulak, who later studied in England, has often ventured into uncharted territory. He openly admitted that his grandfather was from China back in those days when Thais shunned their Chinese roots. He was also in exile twice.

He has outspoken views of the monarchy but seems to get away with his controversial remarks. Last year, he gave a magazine interview that was deemed lese majeste.

"The police questioned the editor but they have not touched me yet," he said.

Sulak, who has addressed the crowds at anti-Thaksin rallies, said he had initially seen hope in the premier when he came into power in 2001.

"One of the first things Thaksin did was to have lunch with the Assembly of the Poor (a group representing the marginalised lot), something which the previous Democrat government never did. It never even looked at the Assembly of the Poor."

But gradually, Sulak said, he found that Thaksin's policies were drafted with his own per-

sonal interest at heart. Now, he seems to have nothing good to say about the prime minister.

Neither does Sulak profess any respect for Sondhi Limthongkul, a leader of an anti-Thaksin group, whom he views with distrust.

"He is, however, cordial to me. So as a Buddhist, I return his cordiality."

Sulak himself is not without flaws. Those around him and reporters who know him find that he has quite an ego.

And people wonder how someone who espouses religious values could use such harsh words against those whom he criticised.

"Perhaps my strength is my weakness," he admitted.

His long-time friend said Sulak's views were sometimes considered old-fashioned in these fast-changing times. And he remains that rare breed who prefers to go around in his traditional Thai attire.

Is Sulak, who grew up in Bangkok when it was still known as Venice of the East ("there were no more than 400 cars then") optimistic of Thailand's future?

"Yes, we can't get any worse than now. A military coup is the last resort. And I have hopes of the young people. Some of them are even bolder than me."

Still, they don't make them like him any more.

Thai Takes

By FOO YEE PING

The Star, Malaysia

Sunday July 16, 2006

The writer can be contacted at
e-mail: yeeping@nationgroup.com

Internal Healing for External Compassion



To be truly religious is not to reject society but to work for social justice and change. Religion is at the heart of social change, and this change is an essence of religion. The teachings of Buddha have much more to offer to mitigate sufferings of both humans and nature in the world. If one is worth living, there are ways one can live.

This was the crux of the talk on the challenges and prospects of Buddhism given by Sulak Sivaraksa from Thailand at the conference hall of the Centre for Bhutan Studies on 23 August.

He is a teacher, a scholar, a publisher, an activist, founder of many organizations and author of more than hundred books and monographs. He is among the handful of leaders world-wide working to revive the socially engaged aspects of spirituality and was granted the Right Livelihood Award, also known as Alternative Noble Prize in 1995.

According to Sivaraksa, 21st century is the century of spirituality. Otherwise the world would

have been destroyed. Buddhism plays a vital role in Asia especially in South and South East Asia, not only spiritually but also morally, socially and ecologically. Simplicity guides one to be mindful of materialism and sensual pleasures.

Bhutan has developed the concept of Gross National Happiness instead of Gross National Product, which will help in the post-modern era, realizing that what they wanted is happiness, not money nor power.

Sulak envisions a future built on traditional wisdom and

culture. Bhutan is unique in this regard.

“We must chain our society to be transparent and accountable. One cannot practice good politics without being a spiritual person,” said Sulak.

During the 1970s, Sulak became a central figure in a number of NGOs in Thailand. He said, “Whatever you do, don’t do it out of selfish motives but out of understanding and kindness. It’s you who decide.”

Sonam Pelden
from *Bhutan Observer*
Saturday August 25, 2006



A Buddhist Democracy

As Bhutan prepares to embrace parliamentary democracy in 2008, it should be cautious about drawing models from western democracy, says a Buddhist scholar from Thailand.

Mr. Ajarn Sulak Sivaraksa, who is a teacher, an activist and a renowned Thai Buddhist scholar, said that he was afraid that Bhutan would use western democracy as a model, a mistake most Asian countries like Burma, Sri Lanka including his own country, Thailand made.

The elections, he emphasised, was one of the very negative sides from the west.

Bhutan should instead adopt the Buddhist model of democracy.

The old “*sangha* model”, he said, which is the oldest Buddhist democracy upholds positive actions, transforms bad habits, purifies negativity, increases virtuous acts and encourages equality and fraternity for all.

Simplicity, modesty and harmony, he said, were the key

elements in the Buddhist concept. He said that the *sangha* model was used to run Bhutan some 100 years ago and could still be referred to pull out positive aspects so Bhutan could itself become a model for rest of the world.

“With the western democracy you cannot stop corruption,” he said. “That is evident in the British and American elections which are filled with it.”

The advent of western modernisation in Thailand started a century ago before it came to Bhutan, and he said that his country adopted western democracy at the expense of Buddhism.

“That’s where we went wrong as our elites embraced modernisation at the cost of our own tradition and culture,” Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa told *Kuensel*. “Now our invaluable tradition and culture live only in the form of dance and music and not as a way of life.”

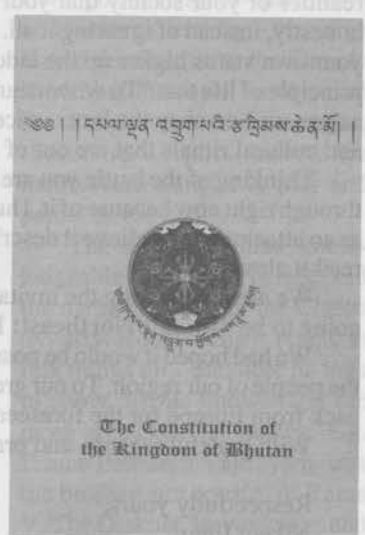
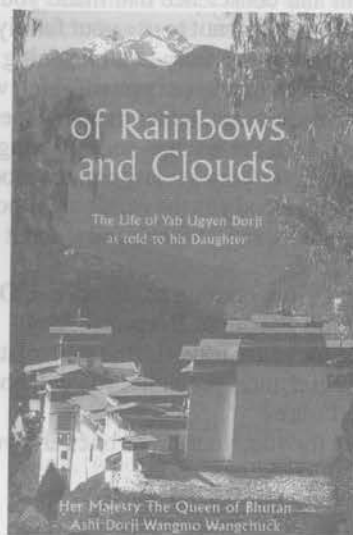
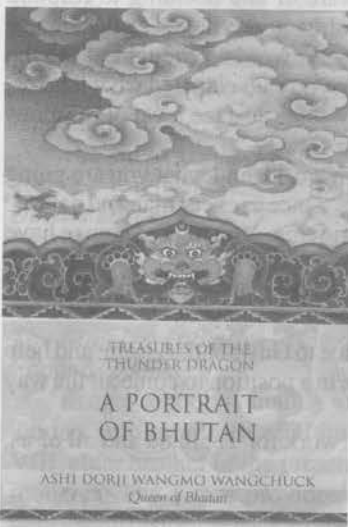
Bhutan, he said, was in a very unique situation in that it

remained isolated while all its neighbouring countries went through the evils of western modernisation, which gave the country the advantage to learn about both the positive and negative aspects of modernisation and adopt what was good and relevant.

“The country’s policy of allowing few selected tourists is a good example of that,” said Mr. Sulak Sivaraksa, adding that while the country focused on learning certain things from the tourists, it in turn taught them a great deal about values, tradition, culture and preservation of nature.

“Tourism destroys every country like mine,” he said. “Our local people saw them as wonderful modern people with great spending capacity. They then started aping the tourists and embraced their ways of life.”

Samten Wangchuk
from *Kuensel*
Saturday August 26, 2006



Respected Ajarn Sulak,

I intended to write to you several weeks ago, but being hedged in by all my other work commitments, was unable to do so. Please forgive me for writing so belatedly. I wanted to thank you for giving us the honour and pleasure of your visit and participation at the International Conference on *Buddhism in Asia: Challenges and Prospects* held at our Institute this February.


Ever since the conclusion of the Conference, we have been receiving encomiums from various quarters for conducting successfully so genuinely vibrant and scholarly a conference. This success, I believe, we owe in no small measure to the participation in it of eminent scholarly personalities like yourself. We are particularly grateful to you for having agreed to deliver the Keynote Address at the Inaugural Function of the Conference. The Keynote Address was classic Sulak; full of important insights, much plain speaking, and bold truths that we need to confront and resolve. Your address was much appreciated by all those present, and particularly by His Holiness. Thank you for taking time out from your busy schedule to come here to motivate and inspire us with your presence.

We are now in the process of putting together the *Conference Proceedings*, which we hope to bring out both in printed and in electronic format (on CD). We shall of course send you copies of the *Proceedings* as soon as they are ready.

Everyone here was greatly enthused and encouraged by your presence at the Conference. We hope that you will continue to bestow such kindness upon us in the future too by your participation and guidance in our efforts to understand and resolve the many problems that beset our world.

With kind regards.

Yours Sincerely,


(Prof. G.N. Samten)
Director

Dear Ajahn Sulak Sivaraksa,

It was so good to see you again at the Asia-Pacific Youth Conference at Cipanas, Indonesia. The youth gathered from all those Asian and other nations, and those of us not so young, benefitted greatly from your presence and the thinking you shared with us.

Permit me to say I was deeply moved and inspired by the story of your life of deliberately choosing to be true to your inner voice on your return from your university studies in Britain. It meant heeding the tough realities of your society that your soul and conscience had made you aware of and deciding to respond honestly, instead of ignoring it all. Your decision not to use your family's already privileged status to raise your own status higher up the ladder spoke powerfully to all listening to your words. I thought of the principle of life that "To whom much is given much is expected". I felt what you said clarified what it takes, as you said, to obey the inner voice and be relevant, rather than live merely at the surface level of religious and cultural rituals that are out of touch with the wrongs and sufferings in society.

Thinking of the battle you are fighting for your society and the modern world, and what you are going through right now because of it, I have felt to send you the words of the poem "Once to every man and nation" as an attachment. I believe it describes your stand very correctly, and it is moving. You may of course have read it already.

We are now getting the invitation for our coming conference in October 7th to 9th ready. The theme is going to be **"India's Northeast: Beyond Blame to Responsibility"**

We had hoped it would be possible for you to travel up the short distance to Guwahati, Assam, and help the people of our region. To our great regret, most probably, you will not be in a position to come all the way back from Europe for the foreseeable future?

With grateful regards and prayers for you, your loved ones and your work for Thailand and all of us,

Respectfully yours,
Niketu Iralu.

The King Never Smiles : A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej

by Paul M. Handley

(Yale University Press: New Haven & London) 2006

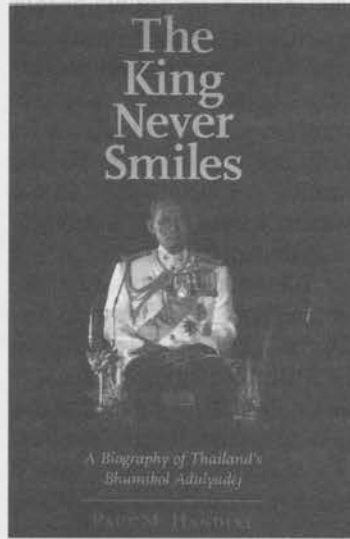
During his long reign of 60 years on the Thai throne, there were three English books published abroad on His Majesty and the late King Ananda, Rama VIII, and all of them were banned in Siam. This is rather unfortunate since we claim to be a Buddhist Kingdom, adhering to democracy and freedom of expression.

The Buddha told us to welcome all criticisms. If a criticism is not true, we shouldn't bother about it. If it is, we should correct ourselves in the light of what was said. King Prajadhipok, Rama VII, when he was still an absolute monarch, said that anyone who criticized him or his government should be able to do so. If the man made a fool of himself, nobody would take him seriously. If his criticism is constructive, he should be listened to carefully so that the government could improve itself.

Now we are supposed to be democratic and we want to declare Buddhism as the state religion, but we do not want to heed the words of the Buddha or of the last of the absolute monarchs, who was the first king under the constitution.

The three books I refer to are: 1) Rayne Kruger's *The Devil's Discus* (London, 1964); 2) William Stevenson's *The Revolutionary King* (London, 1999); and 3) Paul M Handley's *The King Never Smiles* (Yale & London, 2006).

Kruger's book is mainly an inquiry into the death of Rama VIII, elder brother of the present monarch. The author provides a very useful historical background



of Siam, before embarking on the life and death of the late King. The author tries to prove that it was a suicide, although many believed otherwise. His main motive is to enable the palace to reconcile with Pridi Banomyong, the prime minister when the King died. He failed of course, and when the book came out I still believed in the propaganda that Pridi was involved in the regicide so I wrote a review of the book in *Social Science Review*, harshly criticizing both the author and Pridi, which made me very popular in the palace's circle. Pridi was of course very angry at me. Since then I have confessed my sin and wrote a book on Pridi which has been translated into English as *Powers That Be: Pridi Banomyong, through the Rise and Fall of Thai Democracy* and there are many other languages of this book now available.

Stevenson's book tries to prove that the late King was assassinated by a Japanese spy, Tsuji Masanobu—unconvincingly. The book was not well written, with many factual errors, yet it really speaks the King's voice. We can really get to know the King, who is a loner and who does not trust anyone.

Handley's book is subtitled

A Biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej. In fact it is the history of his reign as well as on his own life and work. In the west a good biography must reveal the truth as much as possible. The family even provided confidential documents to the author although these may show the darkside of the person. I find good biographies most refreshing, especially the ones on **Stephen Spender** and **Isiah Berlin**. If an author only praises the man or the woman he writes about his work will be regarded as a hagiography, which is available so much in Thai, especially the commemorative volumes distributed at cremation ceremonies. Although the present King is still alive, his hagiography in English is entitled *King Bhumibol: Strength of the Land* which will be translated into eight languages, including Thai. The National Identity Commission is responsible for the book. I wonder for whom the book is good—not to mention that so much money is involved in producing it at the expense of the taxpayers.

Handley is very thorough on his subject. He used not only English sources, but Thai ones as well. Both written materials and verbal accounts. He did not only cover political issues—nationally and internationally; but also linked the Sangha to the State to show that the royal family used the Sangha for their purpose, therefore right now the mainstream Sangha is part and parcel of the court.

The author is also knowledgeable about the palace and the many branches of the Chakri dynasty. However he is bound to mix things up—the more he tries to show off his knowledge, the more mistakes he makes, e.g. Prince Patriarch Vajirayana was the brother, not cousin, of Rama V. The Diskuls, Devawongs, and

Kridakaras are not descendents of celestial princes. When the abbot of Wat Suthat became Supreme Patriarch, he was a Vanarat – not a Buddhajarn. But his analysis of the case of Bhimontham is very interesting. He also mentioned the significance of the Princess Mother who went to practise meditation under the guidance of Bhimontham at the time of the execution of the three criminals on charge of regicide. Was it her guilt or did she want to spread merits to them, especially Mr. Chaleo Prathumros. However, according to *The Revolutionary King*, the King claimed that they were innocent—as was Pridi. But he did nothing to save them or to honor anyone except the members of his clan.

Handley confirms Stevenson's argument that the King does not trust anybody. His associates were only courtiers and generals – not politicians whom he had a low opinion of – except those who kowtowed to him absolutely like Tanin Kraivixian and Prem Tinsulanond who is also a general. It is confirmed that the King prefers a strong and stable state with military dictatorship like Burma under Newin and SLORC than a democratic regime which he regards as a western import. Aung San Suu Kyi should be with her husband and children in England; she shouldn't have meddled with the politics of her country. Likewise Thai students and NGOs should not get involved in politics or make themselves a nuisance on the issue of national development. Big dams are symbols of progress and technological advancement, despite the fact that they caused the poor to suffer; the poor should sacrifice themselves for the good of the Nation.

According to the book, the King claimed to be the only one

who really cares for his people and his assistance to them, especially the tribals or on national disaster, were effective, whereas the government has been fairly hopeless in serving the people. In fact, officials on the whole oppress H.M.'s subjects more than serving them.

I have my doubts on some of the facts he presented, e.g. Pibulsongkram wanted to join the Privy Council and Adul was only a Privy Councilor in name, without ever joining the meeting. I know for sure that Adul played an active role in the Privy Council. As for members of the Senate, Duan Bunnag was not the same man as Chao Phya Pichaiyat, whose personal name was Dan Bunnag.

It is strange that the author did not mention the fact that Mountbatten blocked the scheme of sending the King to be educated in England as his Lordship claimed that His Majesty was involved directly with the death of his elder brother. Documents on this topic are now available.

The book is divided into 22 Chapters, beginning from his birth to the question on the survival of the monarchy after the present King. The author also provides background information on Kingship from Sukhothai and Ayudhya to prove the Dhammaraja theory of the Chakri dynasty. Once one believes in such a theory – not only on the Buddhist foundation but also on the Devaraja of the Hindu myths, one could really be above everyone else. One could even associate with corrupt generals and dictators, provided that they would uphold or protect the throne, the Buddhist religion and the nation. The Buddhist religion could be represented by notorious monks like Kittivuddho who was not at all nonviolent, but he served the monarchy and the

nation (read the military) against the communists who could really be students, NGOs and intellectuals who sought alternatives to the hawkish regime under American imperialism.

The author mentions that the King often visited his subjects but I wonder whether he understands them at all. His help to them sounds good, but he could never really empower them.

This book makes us understand why in front of the Parliament, there is only the statue of King Prajadhipok and not also a statue of the figures of those who demanded democracy and a constitution. The official explanation is that it was only the King who graciously gave up his absolute power to his people. Those members of the People's Party were opportunists and were to be ostracized. Both Pridi and Pibul had to live in exile and died abroad. Not unlike King Prajadhipok and Prince Boripat. Even the role of the Free Thai Movement which saved the country in the Second World War was belittled.

I feel that the author gave too much credit to Prince Rangsit in restoring the grandeur of the monarchy. Prince Dhani was much more effective in this kind of master minding, but he was so humble and secretive that honor went rather to Rangsit, who was a connoisseur rather than an intellectual.

I knew Dhani quite well. He made it be known clearly that only members of the royal family knew how to run the country. He felt that if Prince Wan did not collaborate with the People's Party after the 1932 revolution, they would really be at a loss. He acknowledged that Pridi was smart but he did not trust the man, despite the fact that Mme Pridi and Princess Dhani were related.

Was the sense of superiority among members of the royalty due to their lineage or was it prompted by public school and Oxbridge upbringing? I feel that the commoner side in the present King, plus his Swiss education should help him to be more democratic and more open to the majority of his people. Unfortunately, he has never listened to them with an open heart. Rather he sees himself as a father figure who can always lead the people, including university students. When they disagreed with him, he felt that they were not loyal or patriotic. He never understands that loyalty also demands dissent. The book gives much information. It talks at great length about the shady characters in the palace and expose many skeletons in the cupboard, which I need not go into. But to ignore them would really be a mistake. On the Diamond Jubilee of the King's accession to the throne, almost all of his children and grandchildren attended. Some of his grandchildren are even commoners. But what about the missing grandsons? Are they alive but not recognized? The public has the right to know.

The author passed a fair

judgement on the King's hobbies, especially his painting, music and photography.

Despite the harsh criticisms on the King, the author has good suggestions to make for the future of the Thai monarchy, which I will quote to end my review.

Regardless of the changes that come to the throne, the revelations that emerge from the past, or the behavior of his children and grandchildren, King Bhumibol Adulyadej has sealed his own reputation, and it is unlikely to be undone. His prestige has survived unscathed, by the virtue of his sheer longevity and his personality – earnest, hardworking, gentle, with an impeccably simple lifestyle. Having portrayed himself as the Buddha-like King Mahajanaka, Bhumibol will very possibly become a cult figure of worship, like his grandfather King Chulalongkorn.

But with Bhumibol's eventual passing, the monarchy's desacralization will probably begin. His heirs are not conditioned to act as incipient Buddhas, nor do their personalities fit the mold. They must evolve and remake the throne themselves before they are forced to do so by the media and

a generation of better-educated Thai – a generation that never experienced the Cold War that was so crucial to Bhumibol's restoration. This challenge is little different from what many Western monarchies faced during the 19th and 20th centuries: how to cede responsibility for the daily management of the state to politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen not selected by the king.

The palace's approach to social work requires an overhaul, however. The mystical ways in which the king and queen raise and distribute funds must be replaced with transparency and discipline to avoid troubling questions. The charities have to become more open and cautious of their image, and not contradict positive social trends.

Some of this change is already happening, and some will be forced on the next generation in the court. Ultimately, members of the royal family will have to make use of one of the monarchy's greatest unspoken prerogative: the alchemic ability and right to remake itself before others do it. That is the key to its survival.

Sulak Sivaraksa

Teaching Dhamma by Pictures

by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu
2nd edition to commemorate the author's centenary in 2006.

This book contains a collection of 47 pictures illustrating various points of Dhamma. They are reproduced in color from a manuscript about 100 years old found in Chaiya, Southern Siam.

In the present publication the pictures have been rearranged



for a more lucid presentation so that they now fall into two groups, the first illustrating the dangers and shortcomings of attachment to Samsara, and the second illustrating the practices leading to Enlightenment and Nibbana. The Chaiya Manuscript is an extremely interesting one, and its 47 pictures are an excellent illustration of the purpose of Siamese Buddhist painting and its traditional style.



Buku Petunjuk Bagi Umat Manusia

Oleh : Bhikkhu Buddhadasa
Edited by Suryananda
Yayasan Penerbit Karaniya
Anggota IKAPI, April 2002

Poisoned Bread

translations from
Modern Marathi Dalit Literature
edited by Arjun Dangle
Orient Longman, Bombay, 1994



Padmapani

The Jambudvipa report of year 2005-06
India
www.jambudvipa.org

Tibetan World

August 2006, Vol. III Issue 2
www.tibetanworldmagazine.com



A Taste of Freedom

Selected Dhamma Talks
by Ven, Ajahn Chah of Wat Pah Pong
Translated from the Thai and North Eastern dialect.
Printed for free distribution as a gift of Dhamma

Cover Girl

Confessions of a Flawed Hedonist
Maura Moynihan



War and Peace in World Religions

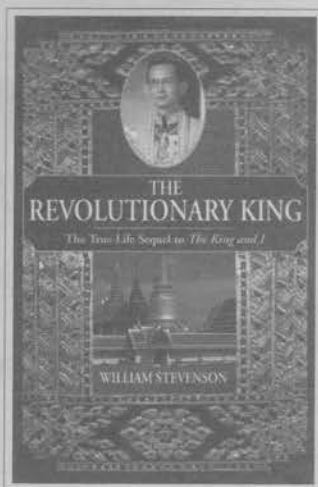
The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2003
Edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel
SCM Press, London, 2004

Buddhism as a Foundation of Science

Translated from Bhikkhu P.A. Payutto's
original Thai version
by Chen Yanling



Three books banned in the Kingdom



The publisher (who is now charged with lese majeste) with Thai Royalties



*Their Majesties the King and Queen
in London (1960)*



*Their Majesties at the Grand Palace
(1964)*



*Her Majesty Rambai Barni
dowager Queen of King Rama VII
at the Siam Society (1970s)*



*HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn
at Thammasat University (2005)*



Mme Pridi Banomyong gave the jade Buddha image (which the late Senior Statesman and Regent of Rama VIII, used to pay respect regularly until his death in 1983) to the publisher on his 72nd birthday (2505). Mom Rajwong Saiswaddi Syasti, great grand daughter of Rama IV, sat next to Mme Pridi. She was the one who had donated the land to the Sathirakoses-Nagapradipa Foundation, which has now become Ashram Wongsanit.