



SHREE MANGAL DVIP Boarding School



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02-03 Newsletter #2, Fall 2002

Tashi Delek to all our friends around the world.

Monsoon Wreaks Havoc

The heaviest monsoon in 30 years is slowing to a trickle. Our playground sump pump wasn't able to keep up with the water. The area in front of the kitchen flooded many times, much to the joy of the little kids. The cooks had to 'walk the gangplank' to get in and out of the kitchen.

The rain triggered landslides throughout the country. We've been ok here in the Kathmandu valley, but the road to our retreat centre at Namo Buddha (where SMD Branch School for Small Monks is) was destroyed. Sanumaya, our cleaner, lost her family home, Her parents survived but lost everything including this year's crops. Our students collected clothing they thought they could spare and donated it to the family.

We've now started the second of three terms. By now, all sponsors should have received a photo and report about your child as well as a letter (or drawings). I noticed that many of the children told sponsors that they are worried about their families. Let me again assure you that the children are safe in the schools. They do, however, have good reason to worry about their families...

A capricious monsoon (heavy in Nepal, nil in northern India, where we get much of our food) has destroyed villages and crops. Civil war festers throughout this kingdom. Transport, communication and food drops are difficult, often impossible. The economy has fizzled out. There is virtually no tourism. Hotels are running at 2 to 3% occupancy. The villages are empty of young people; they run away rather than die in the conflict. The biggest export nowadays is unskilled workers. Desperate for work, they go to Gulf countries as illegal migrants. There is a saying here, "Better to die in the Gulf than to die like a dog in Nepal". The UN designated Nepal as the 'hunger hot spot' of Asia last April, and warned that starvation will come this winter.

Civil War, Arms and Corruption

The war continues. Britain and the US are now arming Nepal. Everyone except the warring factions wants the killing to stop, but there seems to be no will towards peace in either the government or the Maoist camp. Prime Minister Deuba skipped the Earth Summit in Johannesburg to buy weapons in Belgium. After 9 months of martial law, the emergency was lifted and a national election called for November: the Maoists' answer? Three bombs in the valley within two days. The emergency was re-instated. (Freedoms guaranteed by the constitution are again suspended: freedom of expression, opinion, ownership, privacy, assembly, the press, etc.) Even in the Kathmandu valley there are bombs, arson and assassinations. The targets are government people linked to corruption. Military patrols in battle gear carrying automatic weapons are everywhere in the valley.

Corruption has eviscerated democracy and disenfranchised the majority. (The poor). Politicians and civil servants have grown unbelievably rich. In its first notable success (this August) the anti-corruption committee arrested 22 men from the Customs Division and impounded nearly \$4,000,000 of ill-gotten gains, all of it stolen or extorted. The Head of the Customs Division was himself arrested in Delhi during trade talks with India.



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Safe and Sound at School

So: the children have cause to worry about their families, but at school everyone is safe and sound. The most direct affect upon SMD is escalating prices, especially food. Vegetables are the first to rise: carrots 300%, potatoes 50% in the past five months.

Once again, let me remind you: **do not send anything** valuable in the mail. About 50% of the mail goes missing. Earlier this summer, when my assistant Jamyang went to pick up the mail, he found our post box inside the post office had been smashed open. Almost everything that does get through to us has been opened. Declaration slips are removed so we can't tell what was originally in the package.

The Inside Story

Special Opportunity Classes

Our Vice-Principal, who is in charge of academic matters, Mr. Simon Lama has been working on improving academic and teaching performance. One of his reforms has been 'Special Opportunity Class'. The kids sometimes call it 'Special Class'. These classes were designed for latecomers. Many students come to us when they are +12 years, but have had no schooling. If we placed them academically, they'd go into Nursery (preschool) Class, and wouldn't finish school until they reached their mid-20s. Our solution has been 'Special Op.' Classes, where students can work at individualised levels. We offer them the opportunity to 'double-promote' (i.e. Skip grades) if they work hard. We now have 3 Sp. Op. Classes. The Vice-Principal's Challenge

Mr. Lama offered a challenge to our older students at the start of this year: any student who wanted to challenge their grade placement, could do so. Quite a few older kids 'challenged' and were placed one year above their original grade assignment. At the outset Simon told them that they'd have to work to complete 2 year's work inside 1 year. He counselled each student, that in challenging, each was assuming a heavy responsibility: the chance of failure. He taught them that first, they would have to realistically assess their own abilities and second, that success could only come from strenuous effort.



This innovation has proved outstandingly successful. Several of the kids who took on the challenge are at the tops of their classes: egs. Dawa Pashi B311, Raju B194, Tsewang Sangmo B228. **(Photo of Shirley Blair, Dawa Pashi and Tsewang Sangmo)** Along with the growth in academic performance, we see an attendant growth in citizenship...strong student leaders are emerging.



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Last Year's Class 10 Graduates

Sonam Dolma B150 has passed the second round of national exams for Class 10. This brings our pass rate for Class 10 grads to 100%. The national pass rate was 31.2%.

All of our 2002 SLC (school leaving certificate) grads have gone on to higher education, namely Class 11. One of our grads, Dolma B195 is just now going through the visa process. She will finish Grades 11 and 12 in Halifax, Canada. Another girl, Dolma is still living with us and is working as the Office Secretary until she leaves. Another is also still with us. Dawa B281 is attending Class 11 elsewhere in the mornings and working as Teacher's Assistant in the Nursery Class in the afternoons. Sonam Dolma B150, Kiran

B190 and Zamling B199 are also studying in Class 11, but they have families nearby, so live outside SMD.

Most of these kids' sponsors are continuing to help. Tuition fees for Classes 11 and 12 are about \$400 US/year. SMD is helping wherever possible: keeping some with us, hiring them so they can earn money to go on, etc. Here are some observations from Kiran B190.

" SMD has taught me many things. When I first came, I was Buddhist simply because my parents were, but at present I am Buddhist totally because of my own interest. This is all because of the warm environment <at SMD> that automatically brought me in. I gained spirituality within a modern education. May this school remain forever for the wellbeing of all beings, as it is now."

Classes for Staff Members

This year, we are offering at school expense, English and Computer classes for any staff member who wants to learn. (Don't forget that English is our language of instruction.)

Nuns Helping SMD

We now have over 200 kids in the boarding programme, over half of them are small and in need of constant care, teaching and supervision. (Learning how to dress, bathe, tie shoes, etc.) Our Hostel Wardens, Teachers and Support Staff were hard-pressed to keep up. Rinpoche hit upon a brilliant solution: he selected 5 of the 9 nuns in the 'amchi' (Tibetan doctor) training programme going on inside our school (but separate from SMD) to live at school and help the small ones at bath times, bed times, etc. This has worked wonderfully, since the nuns are often big sisters of our little kids. The little kids are cleaner and more secure (getting affection from all directions now). The amchi nuns, in turn, have a large population to practice on while they learn Tibetan medicine and they get to learn western medicine as well, from our Hostel Warden/School Mum/Nurse!



Two Young Nuns



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Recent Events

Thrangu Rinpoche Visits

When Rinpoche was last in Nepal, he spent an afternoon with us. The whole SMD family gathered in the new library. Rinpoche spoke about his twin aims in establishing the school; giving children from the Himalayas an education and the tools to create a brighter future. Rinpoche explained the larger, noble aim: to help preserve the language, culture and the Buddhist way of life. He urged the children to use this precious opportunity and to study hard. Rinpoche startled everyone by giving part of his address in English, giving a good example to kids and staff.



Karmapa's Birthday

SMD celebrated Karmapa's birthday at the end of June. Our Principal Lama Karma Tsering and our energetic band led the procession. The celebration was held at nearby Dabsum Monastery.



SMD School Band



Dawa Tashi
member of the SMD Band



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Canada Day

July 1st is Canada Day. (Yep. I'm a Canuck.) We were invited to attend the celebration at the Consulate. Four girls (Neda Zangmo, Pasang Dolma, Nang Sal and Tashi Chodon) sang and danced for the crowd. The numbers they did were folksong/dances from Nubri, their part of Nepal. The girls were a big hit with everyone, from Carla Hogan, the Canadian Consul to the anonymous guest who bought lunch for us.



Nubri dancers with Canadian Consul

Teachers' Day

Another celebration! Once a year, teachers are feted throughout Nepal. Our students organised the whole day, from start to cleanup. Our chief guest was Rinpoche's brother, Yonten Gyatso. The kids gave gifts, and cards to all the adult staff...it was touching that the kids included the support staff, offering gifts and katas. (ceremonial scarves). We all enjoyed a morning of songs, dances and skits and an afternoon outside with the adults.





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Children's Day

There is a joke that there are more holidays in the Nepali calendar than days...on Children's Day, the teachers feted the students; they sang, danced, played music, gave gifts and read their poetry. The day started with a recognition ceremony for the guests of honour, our student House Captains. Then teachers hosted a picnic outside. After lunch, there were games and activities for the kids. One of our Tibetan teachers, a graduate of Rumtek shedra, composed a song of homage to H.H. Karmapa and to our own Rinpoche. The song was an interesting combination of classical Tibetan language, set to a Nepali folk tune. Another big hit was the Charlie Chaplin film that our Vice-Principal brought. I was interested to see that little kids from remote villages where there are no movies and no TV laughed in all the right places.



One of the Guests of Honour,
Tsewang Bhuti B154



Tinley Singey Composed a Song of Praise
Childrens' Day Afternoon Activities



Dorm Teachers Tsekyi and
Wangmo (they're sisters)



Anis Played Badminton



Tibetan Dance



Monk and Tenzin Chonzom B248



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Fundraising in North America

One of our sponsors has provided me with tickets and an invitation as her guest to attend a huge conference in Orlando Florida in the first week of October. She has also invited me to Parents Weekend at Choate near the end of October, again as her guest.

Between those two dates I'll visit Colorado and San Francisco. In November I'll go to Vancouver, where Rinpoche now has the new (ta da!!) Canadian non-profit. Then on to Vancouver Island to visit my family. My dad has kindly anted up for the ticketing inside North America.

The main goal of this trip is to raise money for more living space. We are beyond capacity now. We have 16 staff living in, and no staff quarters. They are living in storage rooms, the butter lamp room and in dorm rooms. Meanwhile, some of the kids are stacked in bunk beds 3 deep and more than 200 children are waiting to get in. We need to buy a little parcel of land which is inside our compound, but which we don't own...it fronts on the road, and is the route nighttime thieves have used to break into the compound 3 times. Once they were carrying kukhuris (machetes). I want to buy and build!

If you would care to help in any way (introducing the project to anyone who might like to contribute) please write me.

[Shirley Blair](#)

Project Director and Fundraiser



Jamyang Taught Lojong