

INTERNATIONAL HELPER VISIT TO SRI LANKA

27 January –1 February 2009

Immediately following the India International Helper visit, Sri Lankans Robert (IH) and Cassandra Goonetilleke arrived with IHs Judy Gibb, Asmaniah Fraval and Dahlan Simpson at Colombo, Sri Lanka's largest city, situated on the country's west coast.

By contrast with Southern India, the Colombo group enjoys its own house, an impressive, modern three story structure situated near the beach (and reported on in Subud Voice after its opening by Ibu Rahayu in late 2004). The top floor is rented out, with the two lower floors being ample for the group's current needs.

Robert, Cassandra and Subud Colombo looked after the visiting IHs extremely well, putting them up at the Subud House, which proved a very comfortable and practical arrangement. IHs were also treated to a mid-week trip to Galle and Weligama down south, most welcome after a hectic time in Subud India!

Lunch and dinner at the Subud House during the IH visit were admirably provided by the group via caterers. Seating arrangements were relaxed and encouraged conversations with many members. These occasions were a highlight of the visit.

Subud Sri Lanka comprises around 32 members. Some 28 live in Colombo and 4 in Kandy, about 3 hours drive away in high country, central SL. Kandy members occasionally latihan in Colombo.

Whilst there are a few young members, they are few indeed. Many members are into their 60's, 70's or 80's. Several have latihan for 50 years...thus some wonderful experience rests amongst the group, but the general energy level is flagging! About a third of the group is over 70. If the group is to hold its own, let alone flourish, an influx of members is surely needed in the coming years.

Two members joined Subud after becoming caretakers at the Subud House, living proof of the latihan being open to everyone regardless of social status. During our visit, the caretakers took turns for latihan and testing, with another member translating questions – everyone else speaks English.

Of the 28 Colombo members, 8 are helpers. At the time of our visit, three committee members remained active helpers, due to a perceived shortage of helpers. Also, in recent years, helpers have been doing their helper latihan on various Fridays through the month to suit personal choice, to the detriment of an effective dewan. The need for set helper and helper/committee latihan, and for helpers to become inactive whilst they are on the committee, became a focus for this IH visit.

In terms of recent openings, one member discovered Subud on the internet and another by noticing the Subud symbol on the building. Encouraging as this is, the question was discussed: can we be more active in providing information about Subud within the

community? This of course is a pivotal question for many groups, not just for Subud Colombo.

Many warm friendships clearly thrive amongst the group. I personally feel close to several members already and sense friendship with all of them. However, it will require more than friendships and personal depth of latihan to take the group forward. There needs to be change: this need for change became the major focus of IH attention during their visit.

The IHS arranged several 'circle discussions' before latihan on the helper day held on Friday, and on the two member kejiwaan days held on the weekend. These were to draw out questions and to encourage sharing. Latihans were held in the morning and in the evening, after these sharings, to allow for peoples' work and family commitments.

Testing sessions were conducted straight after latihans:

- to deepen members' commitment to the latihan and
- to explore the purpose of the monthly helper and helper/committee latihans, and of an effective quiet time; attitude to those who may be interested in Subud; and other aspects concerning the health and growth of the group.



View outside the Subud Colombo house, an impressive modern building.



Relaxing at the Subud house: Barney, KC and *singer extraordinaire* (we're not joking) (L); and Anand, attracted to Subud by the symbol outside (R).