

AROUND THE SGI

SGI-India Celebrates 40 Years

On Feb. 4, Bharat Soka Gakkai (SGI-India) celebrated its 40th anniversary in 55 cities throughout the country. In February 1961, SGI President Ikeda journeyed to India, the birthplace of Buddhism. On Feb. 4 of that year, President Ikeda buried a special plaque for peace on the grounds of Buddh Gaya, taking the first step toward fulfilling his pledge to his mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, to spread understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in and repay a debt of gratitude to Asia. The meeting of the South Delhi Chapter included activity reports by emergency relief volunteers on rescue efforts in Gujarat in the aftermath of the devastating Jan. 26 earthquake. In a message, President Ikeda sent his condolences to families and friends who lost loved ones to the earthquake, and his hopes for successful rescue operations and a swift recovery of affected areas.

Russian Newspaper Introduces SGI President's Achievements

The *Rossisky Pisatel* (Russian Writer) published an article titled "Dialogue with Nature Exhibit—A Dialogue with the Russian People," which introduces the photography of SGI President Ikeda and his activities to advance peace, culture and education. The author critiques President Ikeda's photography exhibition that took place in May 2000 at the State National Ethnographical Museum in St. Petersburg, writing that the worldwide nature and scenic photographs inspire those who view them. He further introduces President Ikeda as an advocate of peace and arms reduction, who travels the world to act on his beliefs based on the Buddhist philosophy of humanism that respects the dignity of all life.

Amazon Ecological Research Center To Be Constructed in Brazil

SGI-Brazil will construct a research facility on the grounds of the present Amazon Ecological Research Center in Manaus, Brazil. To be completed in October of this year, the facility will become a hub for promoting environmental education and for revitalizing and preserving the Amazon rain forests. The AERC was established in 1992 in the middle reaches of the Amazon on the outskirts of Manaus for the purpose of protecting the Amazon ecosystem. The center has taken on the difficult task of gathering and preserving the seeds of more than 60 species of economically valuable tropical trees. The center expects to play the role of "seed bank" for the entire Amazon region. Also, based on its research, the center will have a permanent, ongoing exhibit for school children that intelligibly illustrates the Amazon rain forests' contributions to the global ecosystem and ways for humanity to harmoniously coexist with the earth through non-destructive, sustainable economic development.

SGI-Denmark Celebrates the Opening of the 21st Century

On Jan. 21, approximately 400 SGI-Denmark members and their friends gathered to celebrate the start of the 21st century. The guest speaker, Denmark's Poet Laureate Esther Gress, told the audience that the most wonderful meeting in her life was the one with SGI President Ikeda, with whom she shares a mutual passion for poetry. Ms. Gress expressed admiration for President Ikeda's humanism and affirmed that the people of the world are seeking his philosophy. Vowing to work alongside President Ikeda for the sake of peace with a poetic heart, Ms. Gress urged those attending to succeed his legacy as fighters for peace. SGI-Denmark General Director Masaaki Kamio emphasized in his remarks that sincere dialogue would determine the course of the 21st century.

Human Rights Exhibition Opens in Ravenna City, Italy

The SGI's human rights exhibition, "Toward a Century of Humanity — An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World," opened Jan. 22 at the Ravenna Provincial Conference Center in Ravenna City, Italy. Many students and city residents have visited the exhibition, which has been warmly received. Ravenna Mayor Vidmer Mercatali resolved to personally work to protect human rights as a citizen of Ravenna. He expressed his hopes that many would come to see the exhibition and heighten their awareness of human rights issues.

New Soka Elementary School Opens in Guangzhou, China

On Jan. 5, the Fang Zhaoling Soka Elementary School was completed in the Fenghuang District, Conghua Village, a suburb of Guangzhou City, China. The school's namesake, the renowned master calligrapher and painter Madam Fang Zhaoling, donated her paintings and calligraphic works for a charity auction to support SGI Hong Kong's education fundraiser. The proceeds of the auction were used to build the school through Project Hope, an educational program of the China Youth Development Foundation, which aims to eliminate illiteracy and foster Chinese youth through building schools in economically disadvantaged areas of China. The completion celebration, held in the school playground, was attended by Madam Fang's eldest son John Meng Sung Fang, deputy mayors of Guangzhou City, educational agency representatives, educators, local citizens and SGI-Hong Kong representatives.

Courtesy of SOKANET (www.sokagakkai.or.jp)