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Daily News

The Noble Dhamma

To re-ignite the passions of town & country folk

FEATURES EDITOR: (011) 242 9216 Fax : (011) 234 3694
E mail: features.dailynews@lakehouse.lk

Buddhist Cultural Centre Colombo

The largest Buddhist bookshop in the world

The quest to dispense the NOBLE DHAMMA

DISHAN JOSEPH

Nedimala is a quaint little town annexed to Dehiwela. Some Sri Lankans are not aware of the largest Buddhist bookshop in the world which is located here. The creator of this storehouse of wisdom is the prudent Chief Priest Most Ven. Kirama Wimalajothi Thera. This amiable monk has a great passion to propagate the teachings of noble Buddha, through every means possible.

I had the privilege to sit down with him at the Buddhist Cultural Centre (BCC) in Nedimala. Ven. Wimalajothi Thera explained, “I entered the priesthood when I was 13 years old. Sri Lanka was in a different era those days. After I was ordained and worked here, I got the opportunity to serve in Malaysia and Singapore. This experience - working with foreign monks - taught me many valuable insights. After some years, I returned to Sri Lanka. My friends were asking me for books on Buddhism. I realised that there were not many good books, with good explanations on the desired topics. I was determined to open a bookshop dedicated to dispensing the Buddha’s teachings to all, including those in other countries.” We stepped outside his office and entered the massive bookshop.

I have been an avid reader since my childhood, visiting many libraries. The way this bookshop has been arranged shows the meticulous planning and the desire to engage those seeking “the Truth”. There are thousands of books for children, teenagers, academics, adults and Buddhist clergy. These books cover deep and diverse topics from Buddhist philosophy to meditation. There are books on Sri Lankan culture and history. The books for school-children have been beautifully designed with colourful illustrations.

Ven. Wimalajothi Thera does not seek any fame. He humbly said, “I had to first put up this building in Nedimala. Then I had to obtain the desired books. Over the years, we increased the number of books. I am very happy that we were able to open the second branch of the Buddhist Cultural Centre in Colombo at Thumulla Junction. Today, we have got down selected Buddhist books from London and America. We have thousands of books at this venue. We also have a modern auditorium at the Colombo BCC.” This hardworking Thera has been supported by his friends overseas in all these projects that have benefited Sri Lanka.

From the bookshop, we crossed the road and walked into the printing press. My friend Janaka Fernando visiting from France was keen to witness the printing process. We were indeed surprised to see the modern Heidelberg printing machines at work, dispensing Buddhism to the world from Nedimala. To our surprise Ven. Wimalajothi Thera even knew some of the printing operations. I asked him how he got these modern machines, he smiled and replied, “If there is a will there is a way.” In creating the Buddhist Cultural Centre, this wise Thera has created jobs for many young men and women. The majority of the staff works in the printing press. Some work as drivers, delivering these books. There are cashiers and clerical staff as well.

The Buddha’s sermons and teachings pointed toward the true nature of the universe, what is

known within Buddhism as the Dhamma. It is recorded that he gave his first sermon on the outskirts of the city of Varanasi at a deer park called Sarnath. This first sermon presents an overview of suffering and the way out of suffering. It is called the “Four Noble Truths.” The Buddha is often described as a physician who first diagnoses an illness and then suggests a medicine to cure the illness.

The “Four Noble Truths” follow this pattern: Life involves suffering, *dukkha*. The “illness” that the Buddha diagnosed as the human condition is *dukkha*, a term often rendered in English as “suffering” or “unsatisfaction.” The Buddha spoke of three types of *dukkha*. First, there is the ordinary suffering of mental and physical pain. Second, there is the suffering produced by change, the simple fact that all things—including happy feelings and blissful states—are impermanent, as is life itself. Third, there is suffering produced by the failure to recognise that no “I” stands alone, but everything and everyone, including what we call our “self,” is conditioned and interdependent. Suffering is caused by desire and grasping. The Buddha saw that the impulse to crave, desire, or grasp something one does not have is the principal cause of suffering. Because of the impermanence and continuous change of all that we call “reality,” the attempt to hold on to it is as doomed to frustration as the attempt to stake out a piece of a river. There is a way out of suffering. This is the good news of the Dharma. It is possible to put an end to ego-centred desire, to put an end to *dukkha* and thus attain freedom.

The way is the “Noble Eightfold Path.” To develop this freedom one must practice habits of ethical conduct, thought, and meditation that enable one to move along the path.

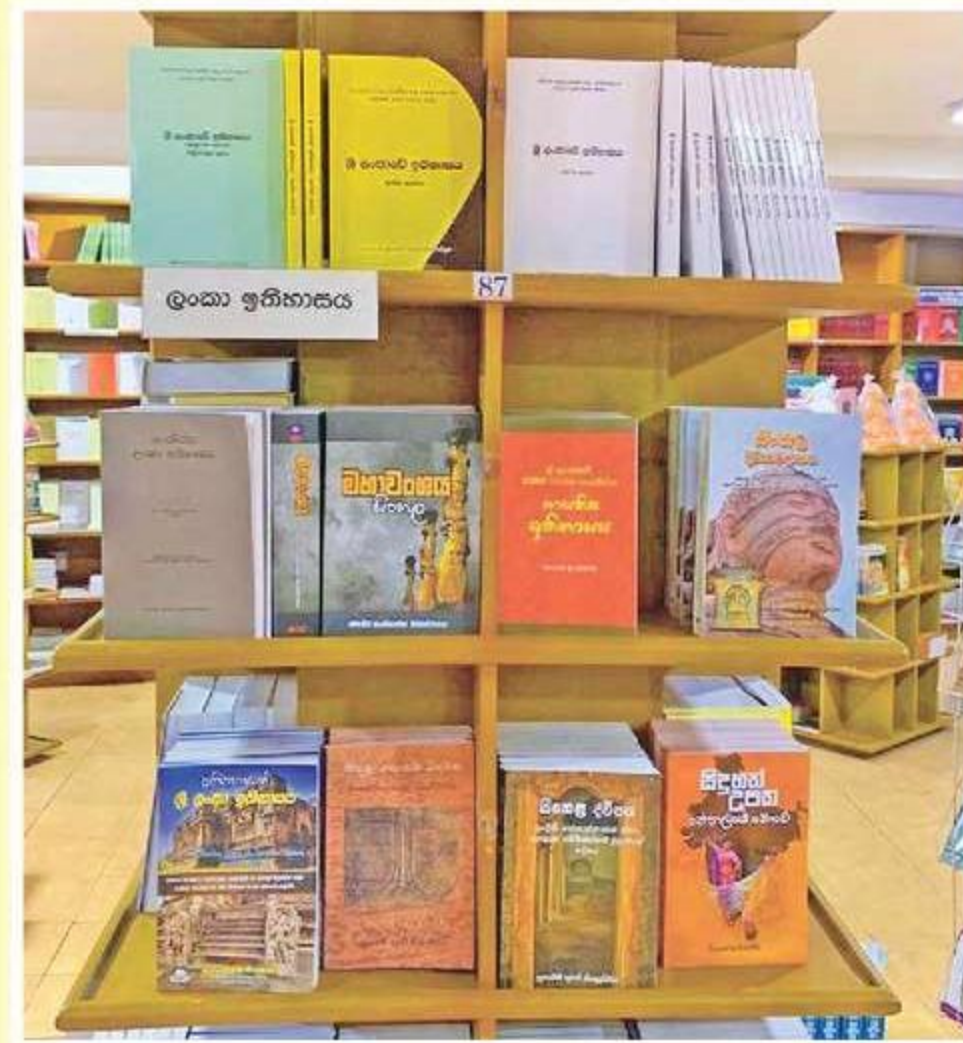
These eight habits include:

- **Right understanding:** Truly and deeply knowing, for example, that unwholesome acts and thoughts have consequences, as do wholesome acts and thoughts.
- **Right intention:** Recognising that actions are shaped by habits of anger and self-centeredness, or by habits of compassion, understanding, and love.
- **Right speech:** Recognising the moral implications of speech; truthfulness.
- **Right action:** Observing the five precepts at the foundation of all morality: not killing, not stealing, not engaging in sexual misconduct, not lying, and not clouding the mind with intoxicants.
- **Right livelihood:** Earning a living in ways that are consonant with the basic precepts.
- **Right effort:** Cultivating this way of living with the attention, patience, and perseverance that it takes to cultivate a field.
- **Right mindfulness:** Developing “presence of mind” through the moment-to-moment awareness of meditation practice, including mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of walking, and mindfulness of bodily sensations.
- **Right concentration:** Developing the ability to bring the dispersed and distracted mind and heart to a centre, a focus, and to see clearly through that focused mind and heart.

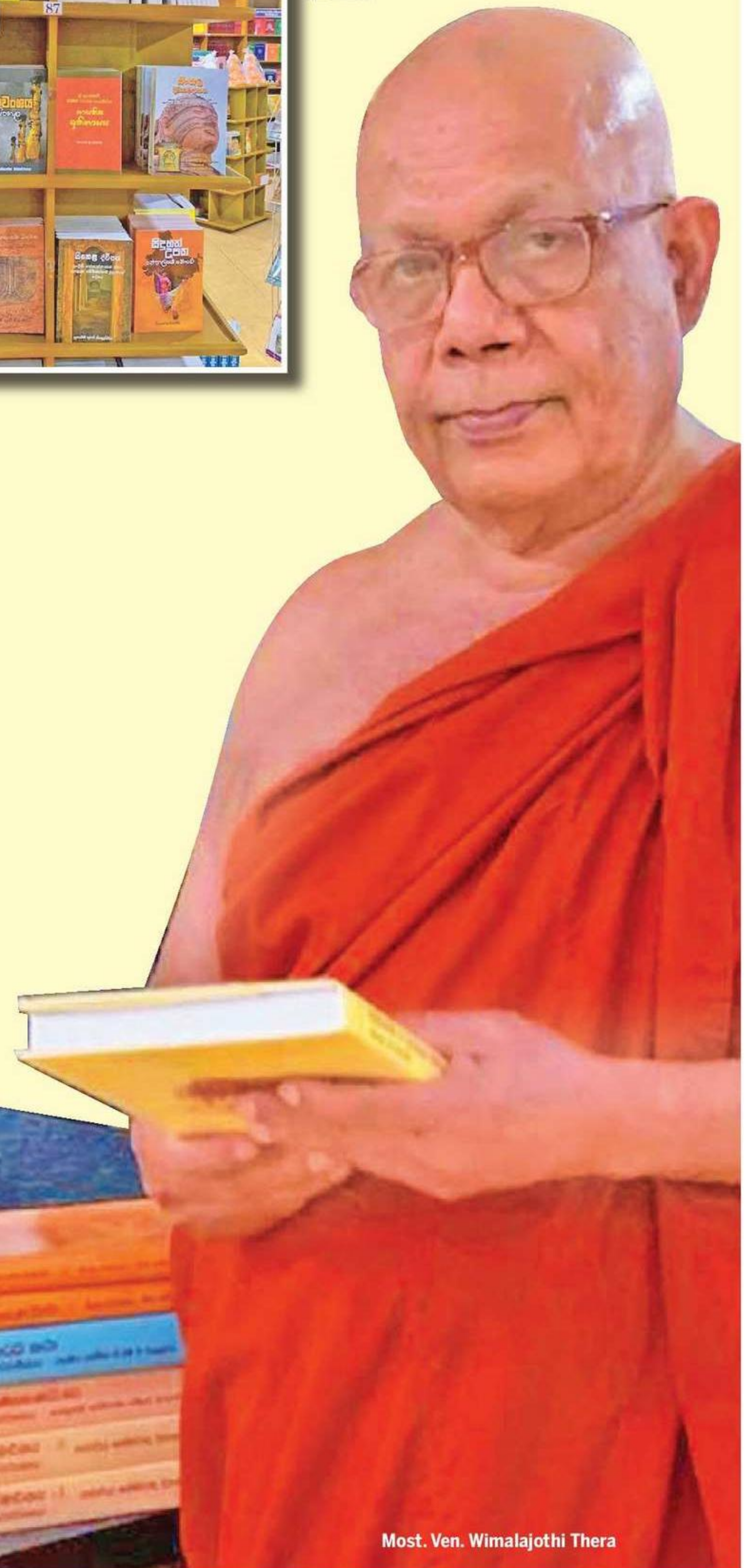
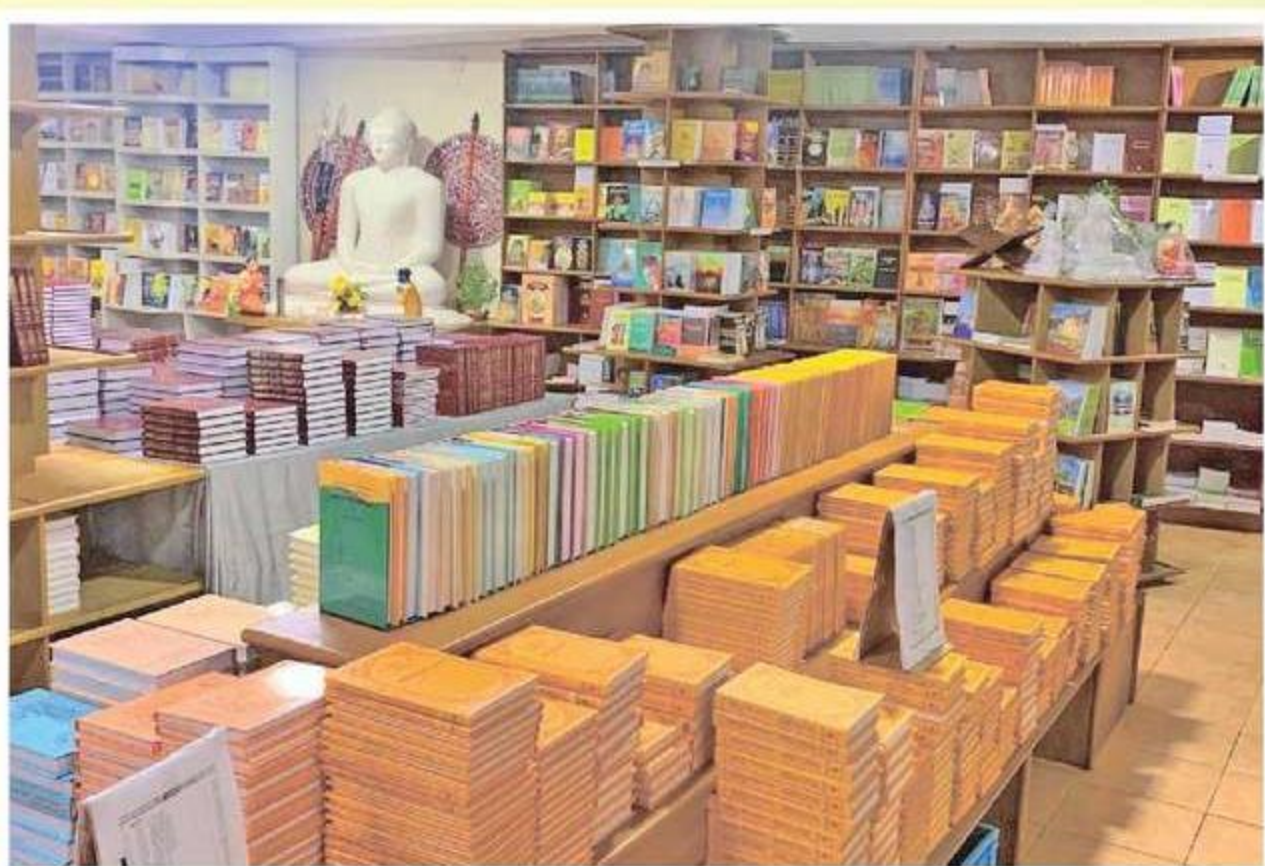
The Buddhist Cultural Centre has been organising an annual book exhibition at the BMICH. This draws millions from across Sri Lanka. Ven. Wimalajothi Thera has spent many years studying and translating the Tripitaka. His desire is for all, including non-Buddhists to buy these books and learn about Buddhism, so that we may understand each other and come to respect all religions. The service of this faithful and resilient Buddhist monk in our modern era will be remembered for decades to come.



The Thera with a team member



Young men at work



Most Ven. Wimalajothi Thera