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A Monk Saves Houses from Wind and Water

Buddhist meditation is said to bring about lucid thoughts. It turns out, however, that these thoughts are not always infinitely distant from earthly matters. Buddhist contemplation of the horrible devastation caused by the 2004 tsunami has brought about a very 'earthly' project.

In the wake of the tsunami disaster of December 2004, most governments in the affected countries announced their decisions to resettle the population away from the coastline. Thus, Sri Lanka announced the relocation of its coastal communities, estimated at 800,000. Moreover, construction has been prohibited within 100 m (in the southwest) and 200 m (in the northeast) from the sea.

Considering all this, Tenzin Priyadarshi, a Buddhist priest, thought: "These are defeatist policies, moreover, coming at a high cost" - and proposed the exotic Tsunami Safe(r) Houses project.

In which way do the new houses differ from the traditional ones?

The design of a new house is based on four very strong concrete columns 3 meters wide, as against the rectangular concrete wall of an ordinary Sri Lankan house. The gaps between the columns are filled with bamboo or wood, fabric or other materials traditional for the sunny island; as a result, each house has an individual appearance.

According to estimates, a Tsunami Safe(r) House is able to withstand wind or water blasts five times stronger than those the present Sri Lankan houses can endure. An important advantage of the design is that when the blast is particularly destructive, water breaks through the light partitions and freely flows

through the house, taking light furniture and stuff with it.

The load-bearing structure and the roof of the house, however, stay firmly in place, so the dwellers have a far stronger chance to survive. In case of a moderate flood, the water just flows under the house, which stands on strong wooden piles 60 cm high.

The most remarkable thing in the project of the priest and the architects who have supported him is that all the materials needed for such a house can be found on the island, while a house for one family (some 37.2 sq. m of usable area) costs only \$1,200.

Construction works are to start in July 2005. The new houses for Sri Lankans who became homeless as a result of the tsunami will be built solely at the expense of donations to the Prajnopaya Foundation.

Material courtesy of MEMBRANA (www.membrana.ru)

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