Bali's Floating Temple Fights Hotel Inundation
Category : August 1995
Published by Anonymous on Aug. 01, 1995

Bali's Floating Temple Fights Hotel Inundation

Judy Slattum, Cupertino, California

The spectacular Pura Tanah Lot temple that you see so often in Bali tourist brochures silhouetted against crimson sunsets is surprisingly small. Today the shrine is crowded by street stalls selling cheap batiks,snacks and souvenirs and the parking lot, jammed with huge Mercedes tourist buses, is five times larger than the rocky outcropping that supports the thatched-roof shrine. Floating in the sea, accessible only at low tide, it has long served as a sanctuary for worship and contemplation on the power and beauty of nature and their relationship to the Bali/Hindu deities.

In former days, the temple was open to the public. But the fascination of the outside world with its idyllic setting became inordinate. Ten years ago the Balinese authorities closed it to all but those who came to pray. Tourists could view and photograph it only from a distance

The Tanah Lot temple was created at the will of a revered brahmin priest, Danghyanng Nirartha, who chanced here in the 16th century and bedded down on the isolated island. During the night, he dreamed of the temple and upon awakening, ordered the villagers to construct it. Today it is one of the six most important religious sites in Bali.

Two years ago, the governmental head of the local district made a secret deal with the giant business conglomerate BAKRI to transform the verdant rice fields facing Tanah Lot into a hotel/condominium development. It was obvious the temple would become little more than a decorative centerpiece to this big-time, opulent resort. When the news leaked out about the project, there was an uproar. Not only was there a demonstration by over 500 students from the Udayana University, but it was

reported in the island's newspaper, the Bali Post-a momentous occurrence in a country with very strict censorship protocol. Opposition grew as the project advanced. Support for the temple's preservation came from the Society for Balinese Studies, an organization of scholars dedicated to the exploration and preservation of Balinese culture. They drafted a resolution that included this clause: "Balinese culture, which is based on the Hindu religion, should be the basis of the general urban and rural planning of the Bali province." They demanded, that until existing zoning laws are revised to fairly and sensitively reflect this basis, all resort construction be halted.

BBC Television, London, has done a special on the temple and its plight. But the Balinese need more support from the outside world in their fight to preserve their sacred temple from becoming a marketing gimmick for a big hotel. The heroic resistance of the local Balinese has resulted in a temporary moratorium, but without more dissent from those with influence, the developers may inundate the little temple locale with a tidal wave of tourists.