

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 60

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

AUTUMN 2016

Diary date

The Cultural Identity of Bhutan

Wednesday 18 January 2017 at 7.00pm

Speaker: Zara Fleming

Zara Fleming is an art consultant specializing in the art and culture of Buddhist countries. She has lectured at the Victoria & Albert Museum, at NADFAS and at the Central Asian Department of Bonn University, the Orient Foundation and Asia House. Zara Fleming has led many tours to Bhutan and her lecture promises to be interesting and stimulating.

This meeting will be held in the David Lloyd George Room at the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

*The bar will be open at 6pm
Usual dress code applies*

Annual Dinner

HAVE YOU BOOKED?

If not, there are still opportunities to attend this enjoyable annual event.

This year the dinner will be held on Friday, 21 October, 2016 in the delightful surroundings of the Great Chamber at The Charterhouse, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN

Please send completed application form (copy enclosed) with payment to Mark Swinbank by October 7th latest

DATE REMINDER

The Society's AGM, and follow up talk by our Chairman, will be on Tuesday October 4th at The Travellers Club in London. Agenda and other details in last issue



Chevening Scholarship Reception with The Bhutan -United Kingdom Alumni Association in Thimphu

Chevening Scholarships are awarded to outstanding emerging leaders to pursue a one-year master's at any UK university. The scholarship programme provides a unique opportunity for future leaders, influencers, and decision-makers from all over the world to develop professionally and academically, network extensively, experience UK culture, and build lasting positive relationships with the UK.

SOCIETY NEWS

Bhutan Society support for disabled people in Bhutan

Readers will remember that the first shipment of equipment to Bhutan transformed recipients' lives in 2015 (see Society's Newsletter 55 and www.physionet.org.net).



HRH Prince William talking to recipients of special needs equipment previously provided by Physionet UK

Physionet is a UK charity which provides much-needed equipment to disabled people overseas. It is proposing to send a substantial shipment of equipment to Bhutan in late 2016/early 2017.

This will include over 85 self-propelled and 30 attendant-pushed wheelchairs, over 100 chairs and stools, toilet amenity equipment, 30 bath lifts as well as stools and chairs for use under a shower. In addition there will be 26 pieces of exercise equipment (treadmills and weight training), 70 mattresses, as well as crutches and other items.

In order to ship this much-needed equipment and ensure its safe delivery to Bhutan, Physionet UK will need to raise £5,000.

Michael Rutland and your Committee are delighted that a second shipment is planned. The equipment is needed and much appreciated and we would be delighted if you can make a contribution to these delivery costs. The Bhutan Society Trust Fund will match your donations as

Bhutan Society members. Please contact Andrew Sutton (andrewsutton001@aol.com) or David Glazebrook (ndkglazebrook@hotmail.com) for more information on how to help.

UK Visa Application Centre opens in Thimphu

Following the recent successful visit of their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to Bhutan, the UK Government has opened a new Visa Application Centre (VAC) in Thimphu.

The new VAC is a joint venture with Australia and VFS Global, UK Visas and Immigration's commercial partner. It will provide customers with the opportunity to apply for their UK visas in Bhutan rather than having to travel to India. The British High Commissioner to India, Sir Dominic Asquith (KCMG), said. "I am so pleased we are able to build on the strong relationship between our two countries by opening the UK's first Visa Application Centre in Bhutan. I hope it encourages more Bhutanese to visit the UK, where they are sure to receive a warm welcome."

DIARY DATE

The Society is planning to organise a day showing Bhutanese films in London during 2017. More details in future issues

A blog of interest

Yeshey Dorji provides an interesting and thoughtful, though slightly different, view of Bhutanese affairs. He is also the photographer who has published the excellent book of Bhutanese Birds.

<http://yesheydorji.blogspot.com/>

Visiting Bhutan – Some Thoughts

By Tenzin Rondel Wangchuk Chargé d’Affaires, Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Brussels.

By many idealists, the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan is often referred to as the ‘*Last Shangri - La*’, which perhaps is an extract from the 1933 fiction *Lost Horizon* by British author James Hilton. The idea of Bhutan being inhabited by the happiest people on earth is a more current label, which again is a misrepresentation of our development philosophy of “*Gross National Happiness*”.

For economic reasons, many Bhutanese entrepreneurs in the tourism industry have unreservedly promoted Bhutan as thus to make it more appealing to the many undiscerning tourists. While the entrepreneurial success of marketing Bhutan on such platforms is not known, it cannot be denied that some first-time visitors are attracted to Bhutan for these reasons. Undertaking a journey into Bhutan in search of a Shangri-La inhabited by the happiest people on earth, would be visiting Bhutan for reasons that may leave you disappointed. Bhutan is like any other country around the world with its own share of natural beauty, uniquely rich culture, tradition and arts and many more – but also has inconveniences.



Bhutanese like myself have often been asked what is there to see or do in Bhutan. Bhutan’s mountains, for spiritual reasons, are banned from being climbed. We host or boast of no natural or man-made wonders. My response, with a shade of hesitation, is if you visit Bhutan, it will be to see Bhutanese people and experience the silence. My discourse on Bhutanese tourism, almost always ends there and perhaps with one potential tourist discouraged. Visitors in Bhutan spend much of their time on the slow mountainous road, trying to get from one place to another. I do not hesitate to tell many people with whom I have interacted,

the borrowed words of a fellow Bhutanese, that Bhutan is a land of short distances but long drives. For an impatient traveller, driving long hours may not be an ideal way to spend a holiday. Despite everything Bhutan does not have, visiting Bhutan is about seeing a way of life, culture, and tradition that is so uniquely different. The nerve-wrecking experience of landing onto one of the most difficult airports in the world or, for those with strong lungs, the arduous trek to the famous Tiger Nest temple and several more are common readings in many of the travelogues and travel guides on Bhutan. Perhaps what is not written about, and scantily if so, is the journey one undertakes within Bhutan. It is on such long drives across the valleys and over the mountains that visitors truly and intimately discover the land and the people. It will neither serve the purpose nor will it be fair to encapsulate here what a visitor will discover on such journeys, as a visit to Bhutan can also be abstract. An experience in Bhutan can also lead to a self-discovery of your innate true being and expose the excesses and scarcities in your life. Many visitors who come to Bhutan for the first time, notwithstanding the “*short-distances – long drives*” become repeat visitors. I sometimes wonder if these visitors have found their Shangri - La and happiness in Bhutan or for those who never return, in their own homelands. Tourism in Bhutan is more officially promoted as “*happiness is a place*”, and indeed happiness can be a place.

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Tenzin Rondel Wangchuk was our honoured guest and speaker at the Society’s Annual Dinner in November 2015

Concerns over growing number of unemployed young women

Whilst the overall national unemployment rate has decreased slightly - from 2.6 % in 2014 to 2.5 % in 2015, - the number of young people (15-24) unemployed has increased, particularly amongst young women, to 12.7% in 2015.

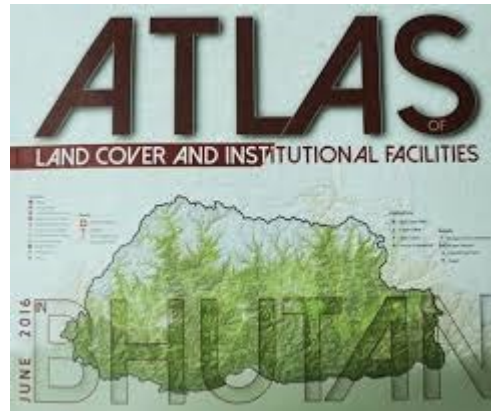
This increase is believed to be due to a number of reasons. Most female job seekers possess lesser educational qualifications, with most having left school after class X and XII. They are generally less mobile geographically when seeking and finding employment and, at the same time, due to family and child rearing responsibilities, female job seekers tend to look for desk jobs that are rarely available in the market.

In an attempt to redress the balance, the Minister of Labour and Human Resources, Ngeema Sangay Tshempo, said, "As an interim measure we have started the overseas employment programme of which 70 % of the beneficiaries are women". The Ministry is also encouraging more women to go into the tourism sector and other programmes e.g. the internship programme for nurses, Guaranteed Employment Programme, and jobs such as horticulturists, soap makers and beauticians.

The report also shows a general decrease in the rural youth unemployment rate whereas the urban youth unemployment rate has increased, which clearly indicates that youth unemployment is mainly an urban issue.

First Atlas of Bhutan

The first Atlas of Bhutan, published by the National Land Commission (NLC), was launched in late June. The 105 page publication, which is the first of its kind, was produced by a team of cartographers under the guidance of two renowned atlas makers from the Netherlands and took over two years to complete.



The atlas covers two thematic areas of land cover and institutional facilities. The NLC is the national mapping agency and is mandated with such developments. "The atlas will be useful for students, tourists and policy makers in better understanding Bhutan's geography," an official said.

The Commission is planning to produce two more atlases. The first will cover historical, religious and cultural sites, and work in collaboration with the Department of Culture has already started. The NLC believes that the country is losing knowledge of its cultural sites and is therefore producing the book for conservation purposes and identification of such sites. The other atlas, a tourist atlas, will have locations of hotels, trekking routes and heritage sites, among others. It is hoped that both will be completed in the next two years.

On line Street Maps in Thimphu

On a more local scale, Thimphu Thromde is updating its Open Street Map (OSM). OSM is a collaborative and participatory project to create freely accessible and editable maps of the world. As part of the project funded by the World Bank, trainers from Kathmandu Living Labs have trained a group of students from the Royal Thimphu College to map several areas of Thimphu by collecting information about building numbers, new buildings, shop names and timings, bus stops, and ATM machines. OSM can be directly accessed by visiting osm.org either on desktop computers or mobile devices. Creating awareness amongst the residents of Thimphu is important to the Thromde so that residents can make good use of the City Address System. All buildings are now numbered and roads have been officially named through the joint efforts of Thimphu Thromde and Bhutan Post. In addition, accurate mapping of buildings or houses and residents will also be critical in times of a disaster or an emergency, such as a major earthquake. It will also be of benefit to the law enforcement and fire protection services.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

International honour for Bhutanese Environmentalist

Rebecca Pradhan was honoured as one of fifteen 'Hotspot Heroes' selected worldwide by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) at the 6th IUCN World Conservation Congress held recently in Honolulu.



The honour was in recognition of the valuable contribution Rebecca has made towards conservation of biodiversity hotspots in Bhutan and exemplifies her selfless dedication and hard work. Rebecca Pradhan is one of the senior staff at the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN) and a pioneer in the field of environment conservation in Bhutan. Fuelled by an early interest in nature, she started her conservation career with the Royal Government of Bhutan. She served as the Head of the Herbarium and Forestry Research Library of the Department of Forests and Park Services from 1985 till 1999. In 2000 she joined RSPN, the oldest environmental CSO in Bhutan, contributing immensely to its growth.

One of her most outstanding works has been in the field of conservation of the critically endangered Whitebellied Heron (*Ardea insignis*) in Bhutan. Of the fewer than 60 confirmed global population, 28 are found in Bhutan (population survey, 2016). The conservation efforts for this species was a project spearheaded by RSPN and Rebecca Pradhan. Many will know Rebecca from some of her notable publications "Wild Rhododendrons of Bhutan" and "Threatened Birds in Bhutan."

Windmills on the landscape

Recognizing the importance of renewable energy to generate electricity, Bhutan has introduced wind turbine electricity in the country.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay in inaugurating the pilot wind power project earlier this year said that with the commissioning of windmills, Bhutan will now be able to harness yet another kind of renewable energy – wind energy. The two windmills in Rubesa are expected to generate 1.21M units of energy and earn about Nu 2.5M as revenue a year and provide sufficient power to provide 300 houses in Wangdue with wind-powered electricity. Preliminary research findings of the renewable energy department revealed that Bhutan has a potential of 323MW of wind power. This pilot project has been developed to demonstrate the technical feasibility of generating wind power and how it may help alleviate the power shortages during periods of high demand.

Hot potatoes

Potato farmers are all smiles this year as both crop prices and yields have increased.

From May to the end of July, the Food Corporation of Bhutan (FCB) has auctioned 1,112 metric tons (MT) of potatoes, worth Nu 22M. This was more than double the volume for the same period last year and the price has also more than trebled. Based on the grade, the bidders quote the price. This year, the large red potato fetched up to Nu 26 per kg while the small fetched Nu 10. Most of the potatoes are from western Bhutan especially Paro, Chukha, Haa, Thimphu, and Wangduephodrang. One of the main reasons for the price jump relates to demand and supply. Limited rainfall has affected potato production in parts of India which has resulted in a lower potato yield locally. India purchases large quantities of potatoes from Bhutan and the demand has been much greater this year. However when potatoes from the Punjab in India are available, the prices may drop again.

Cinema Hall re-opens

The Lugar theatre, the oldest cinema hall in Thimphu, has reopened with a brand new look. The new theatre has *"all the features of a new-age cinema and entertainment centre – foldable cushioned seats, full soundproofing with LED lights, chandeliers and vibrant colours right from the entrance"*

It has also been brought up to date with a new lenticular screen, a powerful digital cinema HD projector and a modern surround sound system. The theatre now has a total of 503 seats with an executive class on the upper tier. It also has a VIP box and a Royal box with separate lounge and bathroom.

The refurbishing works and procurement of equipment took nine months with a total expenditure of Nu 20M.

Whilst maintaining all the original charm, character and dignity of the original cinema, this investment has brought the Lugar back to life and restored it to its former splendour.

A professional team will manage the theatre and it is planned to reintroduce matinee shows on the weekends and on government holidays. The screening of educational films, documentaries and short films at a subsidised rate, will also be encouraged.

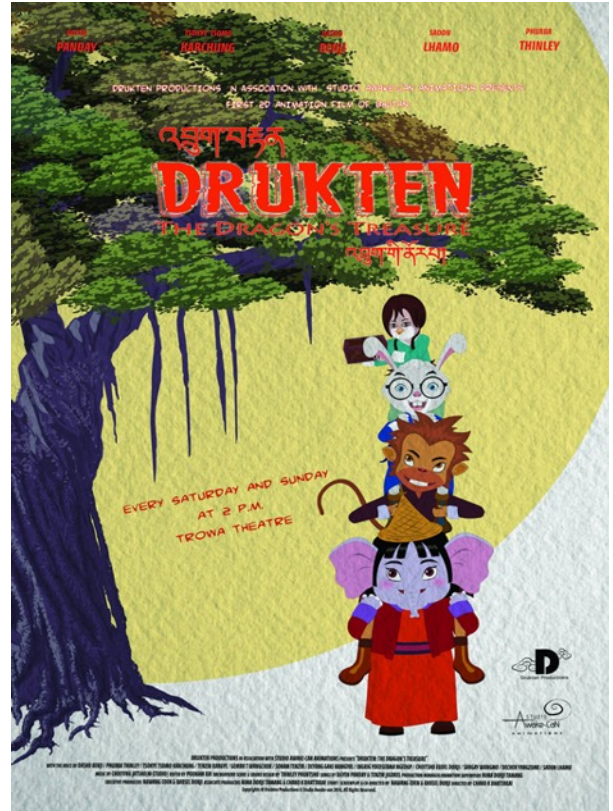
Bhutan's first 2D animated cartoon

The recent launch of an animated full length cartoon with a Bhutanese focus will please many. The first locally written and produced feature-length cartoon entitled "Drukten – The Dragon's Treasure" is based on the characters of the popular Bhutanese folktale of the "Four Harmonious Friends" (Thuenpa Puenzi). The story line is deeper than simply a treasure hunt as the treasures they set off to find, once found, are simple but essential ingredients that

lead to happiness such as compassion and empathy. The cartoon is primarily in English, although a Dzongkha version will be available shortly. Rabsel Dorji, co-writer and producer said, "With English being

the language of instruction in our education system, we believe that everyone will be able to enjoy the movie and its themes of friendship and unity. In a way, the story of Drukten is also the story of Bhutan, so we wanted to make sure that people outside Bhutan could understand it too."

Drukten took over 16 months to produce as the entire production process was kept in-country rather than using established alternatives in India. The animation industry is still at a nascent stage in Bhutan, so there were many challenges faced in developing a 2D animation film for the first time. However with many Bhutanese folk tales available, it is hoped that others can be adapted into animation in the same way.



NEWS AND UPDATES

Growing benefits

Many schools in Bhutan have their own gardens which have been used, to varying degrees, to provide food for the pupils. Six of those schools have received support under the Agriculture for School Lunch Project. Yurung, Wanakha and Wangbama Central Schools (CS) were the first three to implement the Project in 2012. This expanded to include Samtengang CS of Wangdue, Norbuling CS of Sarpang, and Tsangkha CS of Dagana in 2014.

Renowned for her services in promoting child nutrition and food security, HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand has also, since 2007, actively supported this Agriculture for School Lunch Project in these schools in Bhutan. She has spent USD 85,000 on land development of vegetable gardens, building livestock sheds and green houses, and irrigation facilities in schools. Her Royal Highness has also sponsored the Project's focal teacher of Yurung CS for a Masters' Degree in health education from Thailand. He will graduate next month. More than 55 teachers and education ministry officials have also undergone training in Bangkok as part of the Agriculture Ministry's School Agriculture Programme (SAP). During a recent visit to Bhutan, the Princess visited the schools already involved in the Project. Schools reported that the Projects had led to an enormous boost in the self-sufficiency of agriculture produce for their feeding programmes.

One school will inaugurate a new poultry farm with 344 pullets with a grant of Nu 400,000 to feed its 791 students. Under the SAP it developed more than an acre of vegetable gardens and bought three Jersey cows. "We're hopeful that this will help the school in feeding the students healthy food," said the school Principal. "Ever since the inception of the Project in our school the body mass index report has improved which in turn has increased students' attendance. Another school has also reinstalled the potato chips-making unit that earns Nu 2,000 a month making chips and dry vegetables. The modern irrigation facilities acquired through the Project have saved the students more than 20 minutes in fetching water for the



vegetable garden. Other agricultural activities developed includes running a piggery, some poultry, and a vegetable garden, buying a power tiller to prepare more than an acre of land for a vegetable garden and investing in securing a clean drinking water supply and irrigation for their gardens.

The Project is now seen as a holistic development model not only for achieving sustainable development but also improving lives of children and the community at large. Meanwhile the School Agriculture Programme, which began in 2007 to promote dignity of labour among students, has now grown to make students 'work, produce and consume.' The number of schools

implementing the Programme increased from 110 in 2008 to 265 last year. Besides teaching students agriculture skills, it also contributed substantially to the food requirements of the schools.

Between the two activities, agriculture production has also risen. From 48,000 eggs in 2008 to 436,000 eggs in 2014 and, during the same period, vegetable production increased almost four times and pork production jumped more than eightfold. Based on the WHO baseline, the SAP contributed approximately four per cent of the total requirements for food in the boarding schools across the country, whilst pork and egg production contributed 36 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. Of the 172,393 students, 33,131 benefited from the School Lunch Project in 2014 and more than 94 per cent of students attending SAP schools do not have any nutritional deficiencies.

Changes at Bhutanese refugee camps

The UNHCR (UN Refugee Agency) will exit Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal at the end of 2019 after nearly three decades of continued humanitarian support to refugees who numbered over 107,000 at one point.

The UN refugee agency has put together a three-year exit plan, beginning early next year and has notified the government accordingly. As the third-country resettlement programme concludes at the end of this year, UNHCR projects that almost 115,000 refugees will be resettled, with only 10,000 behind in the camps. The remaining population either wishes to return to Bhutan or be locally integrated. The three-year exit plan would also see the UNHCR transitioning from an humanitarian operation to supporting a development programme—with the Government of Nepal being required to play a key role, including making budgetary provisions, to support the transition.



Bhutanese refugee Devi Maya Thapa (second left) with her family at a refugee camp in Nepal. She is the 100,000th Bhutanese refugee to be resettled.

In the event no repatriation takes place by 2019, the UNHCR and the international community are working under the assumption that the Nepal Government will be forthcoming in finding a local solution. They are also assuming that the Government will take responsibilities during that period for the health and education of refugees and giving them work permits.

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NOTE

If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:

rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com

who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

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