

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 80

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SUMMER 2023



His Majesty the King and Her Majesty The Gyaltsuen arriving to attend the Reception at Buckingham Palace on the eve of the Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III

FORTHCOMING EVENT

Date: 21st September 2023

Speakers: Julien Beaupré Ste-Marie,
Lisa Botos and Hank Park

Topic: “Bhutan Believe: the Nation Brand for the Kingdom of Bhutan”

To mark the post-Covid reopening of Bhutan, the Tourism Council wanted to look to the future and develop a new identity for the Country. The MMBP & Associates team will talk about the work they have done to help deliver the new Nation Brand - a call to believe in the nation’s capabilities, its vision, its values, its global contribution, its responsibilities, and its future. The new vision, both for its citizens and its visitors, aims to reflect Bhutan’s character and landscapes, history and ambitions.

The meeting will be an ‘in person’ event as well as via Zoom/recording

ANNUAL RECEPTION

DATE: 10th November 2023 **TIME:** 18.30 - 20.30

VENUE: Savile Club, 69 Brook Street, Mayfair, London W1K 4ER

Following the success of the 30th Annual Reception last November, The Society plans to hold a similar event this year. We are delighted to confirm that we will be hosting our reception this year in the Savile Club in central London. We expect many members of the Society, including Bhutanese nationals working in the UK, to attend and to bring guests to join us on this occasion and Bhutanese students in the UK are also invited to attend. As before, supper will be served in bowls during the evening and will include a delicious selection of savoury and sweet dishes. There will be seating and tall tables for people to gather around. To book, please complete and return the enclosed form.

SOCIETY NEWS

It is always good to have first hand news from Bhutan and following their recent visit, our Chairman Andrew Sutton and his wife share their thoughts with us.

“At the end of March this year my wife and I had the privilege of visiting Bhutan at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade. In less than a week we were able to meet government ministers, senior civil servants, educationalists, CSO (charity) trustees as well as Thimphu based friends. An excursion to the Punakha valley allowed a meeting with the Punakha Dzongdag and then visits to Farmer Sangay’s farm, Punakha Dzong (with scarcely a tourist) and a near-empty (but gloriously rebuilt) Wangduephodrang Dzong. Whistle-stop and quite demanding.



Wangduephodrang Dzong

And what were our over-riding impressions? There are events and developments which, taken together, are challenging for Bhutan. They certainly have the attention of the country’s authorities. A transition is in progress in the government and the civil service; a number of ministries have been re-organised (and even re-named); senior civil servants have been appraised; some have left the service and other, middle-ranking, staff have chosen to resign. Some of these along with other younger people opting out of Bhutanese tertiary education have sought (or are seeking) courses or employment ‘abroad’. Australia and Canada are popular destinations. The long-term intentions of these people are not known – probably not even to those involved. Adding to the general concerns of these trends is that younger members of the health service – nurses – as well as teachers are amongst those exploring opportunities ‘abroad’.

The visitor also notices the current uncertainties within the tourism sector. The SDF (Sustainable Development Fee) payable by ‘international’ tourists since the 1970’s was raised, when borders were opened in September 2022, from \$65 to US\$200 per day – a review that some would say was well over due but, all the same, it was a large hike in a single step. At the same time a (smaller) daily SDF of Nu 1,200 was introduced for ‘regional’ tourists. Visitor statistics – since 23 September 2022 – are studied with interest as they include a fair number of ‘internationals’ who booked before the summer of 2022 and have been entitled to come paying the ‘old’ SDF. The market for tourists paying the ‘new’ rate has not yet settled and, inevitably, the economics of the sector – the appeal of Bhutan compared with other destinations vying for the tourist dollar, the use of hotels, the demand for staff, the attraction of destinations in the east of the country – is of great interest. While clearly content with the direction that the new SDF rates are taking the industry (and the country), the government has announced some modifications to the regime ... and it’s always possible that more could follow. We look forward to seeing how these challenges are met as surely they will be.

We really enjoyed our visit, the first for over three years, with the special hospitality and friendship of the Bhutanese, the powerful influence of the Buddha, the magnificence of much of the architecture, the wondrous hills and valleys and the abundance of nature.”

FORTHCOMING MEETING

DATE: 24th October 2023

TIME: 18.30

VENUE: Zoom webinar

TOPIC: The Zhabdung’s Law

SPEAKER: Professor Michaela Windischgraetz

Four hundred years after his arrival in Bhutan, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal’s legacy remains. The election as king of Ugyen Wangchuck in 1907 shifted political power and control to the monarch and the move to cabinet government was another step towards the reunifying role of the Zhabdrung. The removal of the Central Monk Body from government marked a shift in the relationship between state and religion and the intertwining of religion and government officially ended in July 2008, when the first written Constitution of Bhutan was enacted. However the centrality of Buddhism in Bhutanese life remains. Prof. Windischgraetz will talk about the essence of Bhutanese law which goes back to the 17th and 18th Centuries. Some of the basic legal text was written on black slate, a copy of which can still be found in the Dzong Chung in Punakha.

MEETING REPORT

In a fascinating talk in January 2023, Marcus Budgen and Robert Wilde-Evans of Spink & Son treated the Society to an expert presentation on the Medalllic History of Bhutan. From the first King to the present day, the Kingdom of Bhutan has awarded medals for distinguished and meritorious service. The story behind the medals, of the people and events commemorated, made for a riveting discussion.

Their talk began with a brief history of the medals awarded for the campaigns fought across British India, and particularly the 'BHOOTAN' clasp to the India General Service Medal. During the 1865 campaign two Victoria Crosses were awarded for the action at Fort Dewangiri during the Duar War, one of which was sold by Spink and is now in the Imperial War Museum. We heard how various British Orders and Decorations were conferred on the first Kings of Bhutan, King Ugyen and King Jigme, including at the famous 1911 Delhi Durbar for the visit of King George V.

King Ugyen Wangchuk instituted the first Medal of the Kingdom of Bhutan in 1909 to commemorate his coronation on 17 December 1907. It was conferred for distinguished and meritorious services to the state and awarded in three classes (Gold, Silver and Bronze). David Macdonald, author of *Twenty Years in Tibet* (1932) was awarded the Silver Medal for his work as Interpreter to the 1904 Younghusband Tibet Expedition. In his book he mentions the medals:



King Ugyen Wangchuk medal

'...two Medals, one gold and one silver, were presented to me by the late Maharaja of Bhutan in recognition of services that I was able to render him, and these I value very highly.'

The Medalllic tradition of Bhutan was further developed with the assistance of Spink & Son in the 1960s, when the firm was asked to design and manufacture the Royal Family Order of Bhutan and we heard how Spink still hold the original dies and were shown samples of the orders and the silk used for the ribands. We were all delighted to have the chance to handle the Royal Family Order medal conferred upon Dr Leatham in the 1970s, which was kindly loaned by his daughter for the evening.

We are very grateful to Spink & Son for their warm welcome and hospitality afterwards and for sharing their expert knowledge with us.

Members are welcome to contact Marcus Budgen mbudgen@spink.com if they would like to follow up with questions or to visit their gallery in London.



Mining - new perspectives, new challenges

Traditionally mining has involved the extraction of valuable geological materials such as stone, clay and metals from the Earth that cannot be grown through agricultural processes, or feasibly created artificially in a laboratory or factory. However the recent announcement by Druk Holdings and Investments (DHI), a state owned holding company, that it had entered into a strategic partnership with Bitdeer Technologies Group, a world leading Nasdaq-listed technology for the cryptocurrency community, has opened up a totally new perspective on “mining” in Bhutan.

The aim of this new partnership is to develop environmentally sustainable carbon free digital asset mining operations in Bhutan. The venture will aim to harness the country’s hydroelectric plants to power racks of mining machines that solve complex mathematical problems in order to earn bitcoin rewards. Once completed, this would make Bhutan one of the few countries to run a state-owned mine.



DHI and Bitdeer expect to launch the partnership by establishing a closed-end fund with an estimated size of up to USD 500 million and the fundraising is expected to commence in May “The new fund will also represent a pathway to foster global stakeholder networks that are driving growth and innovation in the technology sector in Bhutan,”

The capital raised will be channelled towards green field operations in Bhutan, encompassing the construction of data centres and the acquisition of cutting-edge technology, which aligns with Bhutan’s ambitious plans to accelerate digital transformation and economic diversification by exploring emerging sectors.

The initiative includes investments in strategic areas such as renewable energy assets that include hydropower, green ammonia and the hydrogen fuel economy, and also in emerging technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, machine learning systems, carbon credit platforms and the metaverse.

It is reported that last year, around \$142 million worth of computer chips were imported into Bhutan, accounting for around a tenth of the kingdom’s total \$1.4 billion of inbound trade. By comparison, Bhutan custom officials recorded this had risen from \$1.1 million of these chips being imported in 2020. A bitcoin mining analyst said, “This cheap, stranded hydropower is undoubtedly alluring for miners whose sole job is turning undervalued electricity into bitcoin.”

However some analysts have also voiced concerns about Bhutan’s suitability for large-scale mining operations. While Bhutan exports roughly 75% of the electricity generated in its country to India annually, its rivers can dwindle in the winter dry season when it actually imports energy back from its neighbour. If that happens, miners could stand to lose out, as being shut down would result in investors not being able to recoup their money.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Cheers!

Whilst many will be familiar with the collection of cordyceps from the remote Highlands of Bhutan, not many will know of the collection of juniper other than for its use for incense and the wood being used for cremation.

Now there is a growing interest in collecting black juniper berries for their distinct flavour in making gin.

A British company, Silent Pool Distilleries, has established an association with Bhutan and is importing black juniper berries from a remote area in the western part of the county to produce a new brand of gin.



The particular variety, *Juniperus Recuva*, is collected by yak herders and nomad farmers who live in the surrounding valleys. It takes two to three hours for the foragers to trek up to an altitude of 3,500 metres into the mountains to collect their ration of berries which they then carry in baskets on their back. Sustainability is central to the foraging process, and they optimise the crop by leaving some berries on the bushes to encourage future growth. Additional ingredients are sourced from other parts of the world. Mountain pepper comes from Tasmania, tea from Nepal and Manuka leaves from the Tregothan estate in Cornwall, UK. Kesang Wangchuck, Michael Rutland's son, has acted as the main liaison with the Company and attended the launch of the product, Silent Pool Black Juniper Gin, in London a couple of months ago.

Government announces new SDF incentives

To encourage longer stays by full US dollar SDF-paying tourists, the Government has just announced three different SDF incentives to encourage longer stays and greater exploration throughout Bhutan for stays between June 01, 2023 and December 31, 2024.

Depending on their planned itinerary, visitors can choose any of the following options with effect from June 01, 2023:

- 4 + 4: Pay the SDF of USD 200 per night, per person, for the first four nights, and receive up to four additional nights without the daily levy.
- 7 + 7: Pay the SDF of USD 200 per night, per person, for the first seven nights, and receive up to seven additional nights without the daily levy.
- 12 + 18: Pay the SDF USD 200 per night per person, for the first twelve nights, and receive up to eighteen additional nights without the daily levy.

The SDF remains exempt for children of 5 years and below; and there is a concessionary levy rate of 50% for children between the ages of 6-12 years. Anyone aged 12 and above must pay the full SDF rate.

All these incentives will be 'reset' after the timeframe ends on 31 December 2024. An online tool to help calculate the total SDF payable per person is available to view on the Dept of Immigration's website at: <https://visit.doi.gov.bt/> and also on the Dept of Tourism's website: <https://bhutan.travel/faqs>

Visitors will also be given an opportunity to plant a tree towards Bhutan's goal of one million new trees, helping to maintain the kingdom's carbon-negative status and exceptional forest cover.

Tree saplings will be provided to guests who wish to plant them during their stay in Bhutan.

Drukyul Literature Festival

This summer, the 12th annual edition of the Drukyul Festival will take place from August 4-6 in the Royal University of Bhutan in Thimphu.

This international event attracts some of the most creative minds and speakers and this year include:

Vikas Swarup, whose debut novel Q&A was adapted into the Oscar winning movie "Slumdog Millionaire".

Pawo Choyning Dorji, writer, and director of Bhutan's first Oscar nominated film "Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom."

Geetanjali Shree, author of the first novel translated from an Indian language to win the International Booker Prize.

Binod Chaudhary, author of "Making it Big" and the man behind the success of the noodle brand Wai-Wai.

Further information on www.drukyul.org

NEWS UPDATES

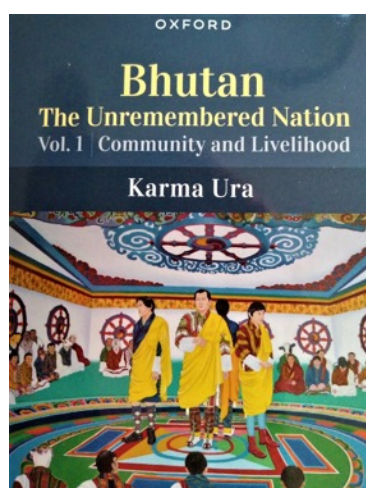
Farmer Sangay

Farmer Sangay is a well known figure in Bhutan being a significant entrepreneurial farmer trying to bring new crops, cultivation methods and technology to the more rural villages. With a background of a family farm, training in agriculture and work at the Royal Government of Bhutan Department of Agriculture, his vision is to make farming a more attractive livelihood for young people and stem the flow of people to Thimphu. There is a great opportunity to grow high quality sustainable produce in Bhutan that fits the emerging brand, and with the right inputs, a step-change in food security, income and sustainability can be made. Farmer Sangay was in the UK in January to deliver a lecture to the EA Sustain Conference, a forum designed to promote rural sustainability. During his visit, some members of the Bhutan Society Committee met with Farmer Sangay and a short film about his work and ambitions was made and a link was circulated to members. This can still be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yUDEV8Myl-0>.



Later this Spring, Andrew and Jane Sutton were able to visit Farmer Sangay at his farm in Mo Chhu Valley, a community of some twenty homes with small farms, about an hour's journey upstream from Punakha. His parents moved there from Gasa in the 1950s and his mother still lives there and his sister's property is next to his. The properties are reached by an unpaved road which zig-zags up the hillside and is difficult - if not impossible - to drive on in the rains. He grows a wide variety of vegetables and fruit including broccoli and brassicas, peas, potatoes, tomatoes, avocados, bananas, strawberries and several herbs. He also keeps a few cattle. As ever, farming is not easy and there is competition from local wildlife. The raised cabins - which

he and his siblings used at night in their youth, while they scared away animals in the night - are still around. Cultivation of a specialist mushroom, Reishi Lingzhi / Ganoderma Lucidium, which is used in herbal medicine, is also a key product grown on the farm. He has an unlit shed to bring on the fungus on blocks of local wood and then a poly tunnel to let the mushrooms develop to maturity with light and moisture. Farmer Sangay also grows a selection of flowers for whose petals there is a commercial market. He is a committed proponent of sustainable farming and is very keen to explore and develop the application of modern technology. We look forward to emerging developments and his role in this interesting work .



THE UNREMEMBERED NATION – BHUTAN

By Dasho Karma Ura. Published by Oxford University Press 2023.

Volume 1: ISBN 9780192865403 Volume 2: ISBN 9780192868572

Dasho Karma Ura's two volume work aims to capture memories of a Bhutan of yesterday. He tells us that he decided on the dissertation in 2016 when the Crown Prince was born and imagines him as a future reader learning of Bhutan before the modernization which began in the 1960s. Dasho also predicts that, by the time that the Crown Prince is a teenager, the Bhutan that those of the older generation, now known to be receding, will have irretrievably gone.

The work is in two volumes; the first focuses on Community and Livelihood and the second on Art and Ideals. A great deal of research has been undertaken in the compilation of these two volumes and careful and detailed descriptions are laid out in a most readable text – along with many illustrations.

NEWS UPDATES

OBITUARY NOTICE

The Bhutan Society is very sad to report the passing of John Goelet in January this year at the age of 91 years.

John was one of the original members of the Society in 1992 and its first Vice President. He and his wife Henrietta had a close



relationship with Bhutan for many years through the Bhutanese Royal Family. HM Ashi Kesang, the Royal Grandmother, was at school with Henrietta. John was an entrepreneur

and philanthropist, who spent most of his life in pursuit of agricultural innovation. He supported a horticultural development programme at Bondey Farm, Bhutan in 1983 for over six years. He also supported many other projects across Bhutan, often in ways that would not be widely noticed. In their earlier days he and Henrietta were intrepid travellers throughout the country. They co-founded the Bhutan Foundation in 1986. John Goelet will be vividly remembered for his enthusiasm for such a wide range of subjects. Tables at his house were laden with books on art, ranging from French architecture to Persian ceramics, books on current affairs to projected balloon transportation, from oysters to vineyards. Subjects changed like a kaleidoscope. He was indeed a polymath.

Many Bhutanese students, and others too, will remember with gratitude the hospitality offered at his home, Sandricourt, in France. Among the many nationalities that stayed, there were frequently Bhutanese, young and old.

For those interested, there was an extended obituary notice published in the New York Times. The link is:

<https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/nytimes/name/john-goelet-obituary?id=42466252>

Support for therapy services

Ability Bhutan Society has around 40 children that all require speech and language therapy and Draktsho Vocational Centre has around 46 children.

From September 2022 to February 2023, Lungten Zangmo, Speech Therapist, has continued to provide speech and language intervention at both centres. At Draktsho, she has been focusing on the younger children that are likely to have a slightly better prognosis after receiving Speech and Language therapy. She has been developing training material, conducting workshops, giving presentations, developing therapy material and consulted with international experts. During this period, Ability Bhutan Society has provided training programmes in around seven districts. The aim is to raise awareness and advocacy along with training and practical skills to demonstrate early childhood interventions to various service providers such as special education needs teachers, early childhood care and development facilitators, and parents/caregivers.



The Bhutan Society Trust Fund were pleased to help with a one off donation as part of funding the costs of this paediatric speech therapist helping children at Draktsho and Ability Bhutan. They also paid for fencing of an outside area to protect the children of Draktsho East

from falls and the play area from incursion by boars.

The Trust Fund has also helped to fund the development of a learning park at the Muenselling Institute Khaling (previously known as the School for the Blind). This included the creation of animal models for the children to be able to safely learn about the fauna of Bhutan.

Druk Air

Druk Air now has a representative based in the UK which should make flight bookings easier. The service is accessed through Flight Directors Scheduled Services Ltd which can be contacted as follows:

**Flight Directors Scheduled Services Limited,
Suite 9a, Gatwick House, Brook Peeks lane,
Horley, RH6 9ST, Surrey, United Kingdom.**

Tel: +44 1293 874912

Email: Drukair@flightdirectors.com

Gross National Happiness

The latest survey on Gross National Happiness (GNH) reveals that participants are happier than in the last survey, which took place in 2015.

According to the survey report launched last month, 93.6 percent of Bhutanese people are happy. This is an increase of 3.3 percent from 2015.

Much has changed since the last survey. More than 50,000 Bhutanese have left the country and have not returned, so it is possible that many of those who were the unhappy participants last time, have now left in search of better opportunities and for a decent, if not improved, standard of living outside the country.

According to the report, the increase in GNH can be attributed to improvements in various areas such as housing, income, schooling, services, literacy, and positive emotions. The GNH philosophy is based on the principle that economic growth is not the most important yardstick for measuring progress. Other factors like time use, community vitality, health, psychological well-being, and living standards are also important.

The results are not entirely as expected. For instance, the Prime Minister expected a drop in the happiness level due to recent events. The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted lives, affected livelihoods, and the economy is still in the process of recovery. Not long ago, securing a job in the civil service was the dream, but today, leaving the service for Australia is considered happiness, even if it is short-lived or possibly not the kind of happiness that is longed for. Having been known for its unique culture and traditions for so long, it is worth noting the decline in the indices of cultural participation and the perception of *Driglam Namzha**. When a society's value systems are increasingly disregarded, there is a serious problem. *Driglam Namzha* was a concern highlighted in the last survey, and it will likely be a concern in future studies as well because the country is undergoing transformation, and the values once cherished, are now being scrutinized.

As always, things change in making way for the new. Learning to cope with those changes and whether or not the Bhutanese remain happy, only time will tell. The next study will be undertaken in five years.

****Driglam Namzha is often described as Bhutan's code of etiquette. Drig denotes order, norm and conformity. Thus, driglam literally means the way of maintaining order while Namzha refers to a concept or system. Driglam Namzha is thus a system of orderly and cultured behaviour, and by extension, the standards and rules that constitute it.***

CONTACT LIST

Vice President	Michael Rutland OBE PO Box 1044 Thimphu Bhutan 13A, Pewley Hill, Guildford GU1 3SN <i>rutland.michael@gmail.com</i>
Chairman	Andrew Sutton West Walls, Cotmandene Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2BL T: 01306 884349 <i>andrewsutton001@aol.com</i>
Vice Chairman and Secretary	Scott Steedman CBE <i>secretary@bhutansociety.org</i>
Treasurer	Dorji Wangchuk <i>dorji.wangchuk@outlook.com</i>
Membership	Marion Young <i>membership@bhutansociety.org</i>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <i>editor@bhutansociety.org</i>
Dinner /Films Secretary	Elizabeth Jacobson <i>elizabeth.o.jacobson@gmail.com</i>
Programme Secretary	Deborah Keith <i>deborah@scottsteedman.com</i>
Student Liaison Officer	Dee Cano <i>deecano108@gmail.com</i>
Website Coordination	Chris J. Watt <i>website@bhutansociety.org</i>
Enquiries	<i>info@bhutansociety.org</i>
Website	<i>www.bhutansociety.org</i>

NOTE

*If you have not done so already, please send details of your current e-mail address to Marion Young at ***membership@bhutansociety.org*** who will add it to the database. There is no plan to go paperless, but it is often convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.*

Published by The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom