

# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 73

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2021

## *Vaccine has arrived in Bhutan*

**150,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, locally manufactured in India under the name Covishield, arrived in Paro on an India military aircraft on January 20 as “A gift from the Government of India to the Government of Bhutan”.**

Four days after India began the world’s largest vaccination drive, Bhutan became the first country to receive the vaccines under the Government of India’s Grant Assistance Programme. Led by the Prime Minister Dr Lotay Tshering, Sowai Lyonpo, Dechen Wangmo and other senior government officials, the vaccine consignment, which was handed over by Indian Ambassador, Ruchira Kamboj, was received by them.



Lyonchhen said, “It was a gift from a trusted friend, who has been with Bhutan all through the decades and in this pandemic too.” He thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and the people of India for the generous support, which he said symbolised the close relationship the two neighbours shared. “It is the display of altruism at best, and an exhibit of India’s sincerity in the relationship we cherish,” the Prime Minister said, adding that this gesture came despite the

enormous challenges India currently faced due to the pandemic. “It is of unimaginable value when precious commodities are shared even before meeting your own needs, as opposed to giving out only after you have enough.” Lyonchhen added that the Government and people of Bhutan were immensely grateful to the Government and people of India for remembering them at this time.

Earlier, India has also donated essential medicines, medical equipment and personal protective equipment in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic and a commitment had been made to a further delivery of the vaccine to cover the target population in Bhutan of slightly over 533,500.

A statement issued by the Government in Bhutan a few days earlier stated that it was planned that the whole population would be vaccinated in the course of one week and during that week all population movement would be halted. The whole population would receive the second dose after four weeks in the similar manner. However it was considered important to start the vaccinations on an auspicious date and since Feb 14 to March 13 is an inauspicious month, vaccinations would only start after that period. In the meantime a further delivery of the vaccine should have arrived; the Government would have learned from experiences in other countries about any possible side effects and also lessons concerning the roll out of vaccination programmes elsewhere.

# SOCIETY NEWS

## ***Michael Blooman's Arboretum***

***It is hoped that this much delayed visit will go ahead in May 2021, pending Covid-19 restrictions. Members who have expressed interest will be contacted when plans are in place. Any other members interested are requested to contact the Events Secretary, Nicholas Thompson: n.thompson@rediff.com. See Issue 69 for more information about this visit.***

## **MINUTES of the ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Held online at 6:00 pm on 17 November 2020**

1. Sir Simon Bowes Lyon, President, opening the meeting, welcomed members, and looked forward to meeting them in person in 2021. He thanked our retiring Committee Members, Dorothea Friesen and Lucy Hornberger.
2. The minutes of the previous AGM (8 April 2019) **were approved by poll.**
3. Andrew Sutton gave the Chairman's report.  
The Society held talks in 2019 by former Prime Minister of Bhutan, Dasho Tshering Tobgay; Sibylla Tringham and Karma Yeshey; by three visiting students; and by Professor Steve Newman. We organised a film evening, a visit to the gardens of Highgrove House, an annual dinner (at Ognisko Polskie) and we published three newsletters.  
The Committee reviewed the Society's strategy, with the outcome published in our Summer 2020 newsletter. The Chairman referred to a current review of the Society's website and invited members to suggest other material which might be relevant. He also asked any members interested in helping with the management of the website to contact him or the Secretary.  
The Chairman thanked his Committee colleagues for their work for the Society with particular reference to Dee Cano who has been providing support for students since early 2020.
4. Rosie Glazebrook presented the Membership report, thanking all 487 current members for their support and involvement, and encouraged them to share ideas with her to continue activities online.
5. David Glazebrook presented the Treasurer's report on behalf of Dorji Wangchuk.  
The Society ended 2019 with net assets of £24,900, including £15,210 cash in the bank and the interest-free loan of £10,003 to the Trust Fund. There was a surplus of £328 on the year. The Society continues in good financial health. The accounts for 2019 **were approved by poll.**
6. David Glazebrook summarised the changes to the Committee. Retiring from the Committee: Dorothea Friesen and Lucy Hornberger have retired from the Committee with our gratitude.  
Nominated to the Committee: Dee Cano's election **was approved by poll.**  
The current Committee **was confirmed by poll:** Andrew Sutton as Chairman, David Glazebrook as Secretary, Dorji Wangchuk as Treasurer, Sylvia Robert-Sargeant as Newsletter Editor, Rosie Glazebrook as Membership Secretary, Dee Cano as Student Liaison Officer, Elizabeth Jacobson as Dinner Secretary and Events Group (Films), and Nicholas Thompson as Events Group Secretary.
7. Any other business and meeting closure.  
The President noted that no other business had been shared in advance with the Secretary. He thanked Michael Rutland for recording his talk to be played after the AGM, noting how successfully Bhutan has handled the epidemic. He thanked members for attending and closed the meeting.

**David Glazebrook, Secretary**

**18 November 2020**

# SOCIETY REPORTS

## TEXTILES OF BHUTAN

At the first meeting of the Society in 2021, over a hundred members and friends of the Society - with some even joining in from Bhutan - enjoyed an excellent talk and presentation via Zoom given by Zara Fleming. Below is a summary of her well-illustrated talk.

Bhutan's textile tradition is an essential part of its national identity and this lecture explored the two distinct types of textiles. *Thagzo*, those fabrics woven exclusively by women and *Tshemzo*, those items cut, stitched and embroidered by men. These textiles are woven into every aspect of Bhutanese life, especially after the



first Shabdrung Rinpoche introduced *Driglam Namzha* (the code of etiquette advising on what one should wear) and *Zorig Chusom* (the promotion of the thirteen arts and crafts of Bhutan).

Nettle, cotton, silk and wool are the fibres used and Bhutan is rich in natural dyes, such as indigo for blue, symlocus for yellow and madder and stick lac for red. Nearly every home has a loom and the weavers produce highly skilled textiles, renowned for their mastery of colour, pattern and composition. The most prized of all is the *kushutara*, characterised by its high silk content and the special technique of discontinuous weft patterning known as *kushu* (meaning brocade) which produces an amazing variety of intricate motifs.

Textiles in Bhutan represent status, wealth, forms of payment and capital. Indeed they were the main currency in Bhutan prior to the mid-20th

century. Gifts of cloth mark important social occasions, such as birth, marriage and career promotion. Many of the Bhutanese textiles housed in UK museums (V & A, British Museum, World Museum Liverpool) are diplomatic gifts presented to British Political Officers with responsibility for Bhutan in the early 20th century. Men, often monks, work mainly with imported silks and brocades initially from China. They cut, stitch, embroider and applique a vast range of clothing, ceremonial and ritual fabrics, thangkas and dance costumes. The latter are visible in all their glory at the *tsechus* held at the various dzongs throughout the country on an annual basis. Times are changing with easy care machine woven fabrics now available from India, but Bhutan's highly sophisticated textile tradition continues to be promoted and preserved as an essential part of its national identity.



### Web site and on line developments

Clearly as the pandemic rolls on, we are still not in a position to fix dates for any events other than virtual ones - like the excellent talk reported above - which many of us were able to enjoy recently via Zoom. However the Committee continues to explore and develop a whole range of exciting virtual activities which we can all still enjoy. To make sure you do not miss out on receiving notices of all these forthcoming events and other developments on the web site, could you please ensure that the Membership Secretary, Rosie Glazebrook has your latest e-mail address. Contact her on: [rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com). If you have not checked the web site recently, a number of interesting interviews, videos and talks have been added - and do look out for more soon.

## **Web site on Himalayan Climate Studies**

The Department of Research and External Relations of the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) has recently launched a web site entitled “Bhutan Himalayan Climate Studies” and an e-book entitled “Reaching New Heights Through Policy Research and Practice”.

The web site portal, according to the RUB, is established with the aim of creating a hub for interactions between climate researchers, government decision makers and operational staff, so helping to bridge the gap between climate adaptation research, policy and operations. A RUB spokesperson said, “The content of the web site will have a background on Bhutan Himalayan climate study projects and address challenges related to climate change in the Himalayas. It will also highlight the rationale for the climate studies in Bhutan and the Himalayas, and with partners and stakeholders involved, share the expected outcomes from a series of workshops in disseminating climate studies and opportunities in Bhutan.” Both students and lecturers of the RUB will have access to the technical papers and content of the web site by registering and participating in the discussion forums and it is hoped that through this web site, international and development partners could be attracted to supporting climate studies in Bhutan.

Meanwhile, the e-book, which is dedicated to the 4th Druk Gyalpo for His Majesty’s inspirational leadership and wisdom, has been published with an aim of assisting the policymakers to frame an evidenced-based policy and decisions for the country. “Though the book focuses on all the topical studies presented through discipline-specific view, specific focus is on educational policy”.

## **Cookbook Series**

Coinciding with Children’s Day celebrations in Bhutan in November, a new cookbook “Let’s cook for Ama” was launched. Kinley Tshering, Creative Director of Zoom



Out Productions, said that through this initiative they hoped to start a conversation around the need for traditional gender roles to shift within the household. “To start with, we hope to inspire fathers, husbands, brothers and children to set aside at least one day of the week to take care of the women in their lives and pamper them with love and good food.”

This cookbook series is the first of its kind featuring Bhutanese cuisine in a fun, easy to follow, engaging story format and will include five stories featuring five special cuisines from different regions of the country. The books will be available in both digital and PDF versions and will be shared through the Facebook Page: @ letscookforama. Through the support of Britannia Industries, a market leader in cheese production, printed versions of the books will be distributed to 20 schools in remote parts of the country.

## **New Sports League**

Bhutan Baseball and Softball, officially launched in Bhutan in 2013, is in the process of establishing its first inter-scholastic league. It is a community association including youth practices and games for those aged between 6-18 years old, local club teams with members aged above 16 years and an adult national league aged above 18. Within one month of its launch, over 500 players attended the training sessions and they now have around 800 youths and adults members registered with an interest in developing their skills as baseball or softball players, coaches, and umpires.

Most of the participants are male (83%) and talent varies from beginner to seven years of experience with 68% training as players, 32% training as coaches and umpires. All of the training programmes are currently based in Thimphu but the British Olympic Committee will be introducing baseball to other districts during each Olympic Day and there will be an inaugural international camp for players and coaches, hopefully in the spring of 2021, Covid-19 protocols permitting.



# KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

## UN Population Award



**In a virtual ceremony in Thimphu in December, Her Majesty the Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck was awarded the individual laureate award for the 2020 UN Population Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to raising awareness and devising solutions to population and reproductive health issues.**

The UN Population Award is the most prestigious award in the field of reproductive health and population and the annual award honours an individual and or/ institution in recognition of their outstanding contributions to population and reproductive health issues and solutions. Her Majesty the Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck is the longest-serving UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador to Bhutan and has been involved since January 1999. A special documentary on Her Majesty's journey as the UNFPA Goodwill Ambassador for 21 years was screened in the Grand Kuenray prior to the virtual award ceremony. Her Majesty the Gyalyum expressed her appreciation to the members of the UN Population Award Committee for the conferment of the prestigious award and said that the award was of great personal significance given that it represents the hopes and aspirations of the most vulnerable women and children, a matter that is close to Her Majesty's heart. Her Majesty the Gyalyum also paid tribute and expressed gratitude to the many individuals and organisations for their contributions and support over the years culminating in the recognition of the award.

## Official Olympic Slot for Archer

Bhutan has been sending archers to the Olympic Games for some time, so it is no longer a novelty that the Bhutanese archery squad exits. Previously the country had only been included in the line-up after receiving one (or more) of the coveted universality invitation spots that the International Olympic Committee and World Archery dole out each Olympiad. With the number of such wild cards being reduced, there was no certainty that Bhutan would be offered a place at the next Olympics in Tokyo. So the country's archery squad decided it was time to step up and try to win a place outright. Karma did just that at the Asian continental qualifier in Bangkok in November 2019, and became the first athlete from Bhutan to win a quota place to the Olympic Games. Karma, aged 29, competed at Rio 2016 - she was the country's flag bearer on that occasion - and had made her debut Olympic appearance in London in 2012.

Karma feels she was lucky to have such a good coach - Young Sook Park - who was a member of the Korean Team at Los Angeles in 1984.

Training with her, Karma said, "I underwent rigorous training under the guidance of Coach Young Sook, who is now the head coach in



Bhutan, and worked really hard and trained daily - both physically and mentally. Qualifying for an Olympic place motivated me to train more and harder. It made me realise that nothing is impossible if you really work hard."

## Year of the Female Ox?

The Year of the Female Ox, which begins on February 12th, has caused much confusion, but the gender of animals in Bhutanese astrology cannot be changed. The ox and rooster will be female, even if not biologically. The interpretation is different and should not be taken literally.

Astrologer Rinchen Wangdi said all the 12 zodiac animals are categorised into two, male and female. Rat, tiger, dragon, horse, monkey and dog are male. Ox, rabbit, snake, sheep, bird (rooster) and pig are female. The gender of these animals in astrology is not interchangeable. Male and female years come alternately. Eight years from now we will welcome the Female Rooster Year.

Buddhist scholar and founder of Loden Foundation, Dr. Karma Phuntsho explains that the male and female in the calendar are a rendering of the Chinese Yin and Yang qualities. He said the oxymoronic term "female ox" is a problem of cultural translation. "In Dzongkha, the term Lang refers to an ox but in Choekey, it does not necessarily refer to an ox; the term is gender neutral. This is a good example of how we will create cultural confusion as we use a foreign language to try to convey cultural concepts."

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## *Traveller's Tales*

Many of us have been lucky to have travelled in Bhutan and whenever we return to the country, we are all amazed, and sometimes feel challenged, by the fast changing pace and style of life we experience. For those few who were able to visit the country more than 40 or 50 years ago, the stories they return with are even more fascinating. In this issue we are delighted to share the recollections of Simon and Caroline Bowes Lyon who visited Bhutan in 1966 on their honeymoon.



"Visiting Bhutan was originally planned as a botanical trip, but it also became our honeymoon. We had the great good fortune to be guests of HM Ashi Kesang, now the Royal Grandmother, and stayed in her remarkable family house Namseling.(1966 photo) We also stayed with her in Ugyen Peri in Paro, a most delightful palace in comfortable traditional style: one enchanting room had scarlet walls embellished with beautiful murals. We remember dinners followed by dancing, and the hilarity when we were pulled into the dance ourselves. And of course the delight of Bhutanese baths.

However, we did not enjoy this luxury for long: we were off on a trek collecting plant specimens – eventually contributing to the Flora of Bhutan published 20 years later. Accompanied by then Captain Yeshey Dorji, we aimed to go up to Lunana from the east side. In those days the "jeepable" road ended soon beyond Dochula, and after that we walked to Bumthang, camping or staying with hospitable villagers. Often we were invited to doss down in the best room in the house with its altar. Other times we camped in our old fashioned tent, trying to avoid the leeches which could creep in.

After a few weeks we reached Bumthang but no local people wanted to guide us up to Lunana. Then luckily we met a group of traders with yaks coming from Lunana, with loads of butter to exchange for rice, and they happily agreed to take us back. So we headed up Mangde Chu for an eventful journey in monsoon rains, past beautiful lakes bordered with rhododendrons and other flowers. For several days we walked under the great Gangkar Puensum mountain without realizing it was there in the mist. The worst moment was camping in the snow at 17,000 feet before descending to the welcome of Lunana village."

## ***Bhutan Society Trust Fund – Hope 108***

The challenge of access to schooling has been personally brought to life for British pupils over the past year. Current crisis apart, this is a trial also faced by disadvantaged children across remote areas of Bhutan. Under the badge Hope 108, founder and also Bhutan Society member Dee Cano, has been helping to enable educational access for pupils in nine rural schools. Since 2019, grants from the Bhutan Society Trust Fund have helped Hope 108 fund pupils across two schools in Haa: Sangbaykha Primary School and Jyengkha Primary School. The Trust Fund has contributed in parallel to other friends and supporters of Hope 108, including individual Bhutan Society members. Sponsorship enables the purchase of essentials such as uniform, shoes, sports kit, blankets, stationery and books. Principals at each school oversee the scheme, with teachers responsible jointly with the pupils for spending individual budgets once awarded. Hope 108's insight is that relatively small budgets can make a considerable difference to the level and quality of school participation when combined with the right grassroots management. "This initiative has brought many positive changes to children, physically and emotionally," says Dawa Gyeltshen, Officiating Principal at Sangbaykha Primary School. "Academic performance, attendance, and rate of participation in classroom and co-curricular activities of the children have improved dramatically after receiving the support."

***The Bhutan Society Trust Fund is organising a donation of 3,000 new books to support libraries in Bhutan later in 2021. If you would like to find out more, and/or wish to support this project, please contact [rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com](mailto:rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com)***



***Principal Dawa Gyeltshen with Norbin Rai delighted with his new football***

# NEWS AND UPDATES

## *Visiting Bhutan*

With the sudden drop in the number of visitors from 200,000 to 28,000 and in revenue from \$225 million to \$19 million from 2019 to 2020, the Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) has been taking some wide ranging initiatives to help the sector recover.

There are around 14 sites where work is being done mainly by a Bhutanese workforce of over 1,000, some of the 50,000 individuals normally dependent on tourism for their livelihood. Activities range from developing the road from Trashigang to Haa, building more toilets and establishing a cleaning campaign along the tourism hotspots, beautification of Taktshang route and other tasks such as helping the government to control the dog population. Tourism sector employees are also engaged in up-skilling programmes ranging from foreign language courses for guides to culinary training for cooks and chefs and craftsmen were also being trained to produce Bhutanese products to counter the planned high tax being imposed on imported handicraft goods.

The TCB hopes to start opening the country to tourism by June, but the decision will solely depend on how the Covid-19 situation unfolds during the coming months. However the much-awaited Tourism Policy was cleared by the Cabinet in January. Unlike in the past, the Government will now have to take measures to promote tourism as a year-round activity. This is the first such document since tourism started in 1974. Areas with minimum tourism activity could see tourism products and service developments as the policy pushes the Government to spread such activities in those regions. This will be achieved through provision of differing incentives and emphasis shifts to balance tourism activities in all regions.

To help maintain the existing approach of “high value, low volume” and to avoid mass tourism, the Government will also manage and regulate visitors by adopting appropriate pricing and other mechanisms like a sustainable development fee and a minimum daily package rate, among others. The Policy now states that all initiatives related to tourism by the private sector will also be routed and endorsed by the TCB.

Meanwhile, Druk Neykor, a collaboration of TCB with Commission for the Monastic Affairs of Bhutan, was launched on National Day in December with a pilgrimage to 16 holy-sites in Thimphu. A spokesperson at the launch said, “Today, people are interested in domestic pilgrimage and there is a good opportunity to visit around 108 pilgrimage destinations and a recognition certificate would be given to persons on completion of the pilgrimage.”

## *Build Bhutan Project*

This project has been developed by the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources on the direct initiative of HM The King to strengthen – through high quality training – the skills of Bhutanese in trades relevant to construction, water/irrigation, agriculture and manufacturing.

It will be seen as satisfying employment for the young and for those now without work because of the Covid-19 situation. But in the medium and longer term, the Project will see Bhutan better equipped to build its infrastructure with its own workforce, to reduce significantly its dependence on imported labour and to minimise the youth unemployment problem. Through the provision of genuinely high-quality training, the Project aims to raise the profile of working in the construction industry, agriculture and related industries among the young of Bhutan and to bring long-term benefits to the Kingdom’s economy and to its social stability.

The Government is looking for qualified and experienced Technical and Vocational Skills trainers from the United Kingdom who can work in Bhutan for periods of between six months and a year ... or even longer. The particular specialisms sought include Masonry; Construction Carpentry; Plumbing; Electrical; Welding (steel fabrication); Building Painting; and Water and Irrigation technology. For those with appropriate experience and interest, in addition to carrying-out training, the trainers can be involved with assessments of existing standards and curricula; how to upgrade these to international standards; how to develop trainers and mentors; and supervision and assessment of students. They will be asked to submit a written report at the end of their stay. Their contributions to policy and practice can be significant. Precise conditions and terms of service will depend on negotiation with individual trainers but this is an opportunity to contribute significantly to a major initiative in Bhutan.

In the UK, candidates with the relevant qualifications and levels of experience are likely to be in, or recently retired from, our public and private training systems or in an established construction or engineering company, particularly one which operates apprenticeship training schemes. Their employers could well be persuaded that the opportunity to contribute to Bhutan’s socio-economic development would be good not only for the career development of an individual but also for the public profile of the company or organisation. Members are invited to think whether they know of a potential candidate or whether they have any formal or informal contacts, especially at a high level, with a relevant employer, for example those who run apprenticeship schemes, who may be interested to hear more of the opportunities within the Build Bhutan Project. This Project is also summarised in a government sponsored video: **BuildBhutanProject** which can be viewed on YouTube.

**Further information is available from Michael Rutland in Thimphu – [rutland.michael@gmail.com](mailto:rutland.michael@gmail.com).**

## 1-Stop Yak Shop

**Started with 51 members just over a year ago, Haa Valley Yak Herder Primary Co-operative is now all set to open its one-stop yak products shop.**

The members agreed that the store would target both locals and international tourists to help improve the economy of yak herders. Haa's dzongkhag livestock officer, Tshering Dorji



said, "The shop will serve as an authentic 1-stop shop for those interested in yak products." It was not clear what products would be sold but traditional food products such as cheese and butter would be available along with wool and leather items. Whether one of more popular

western items, such as yak dog chews, will be for sale is not known! The Co-operative also proposed other alternatives to diversify the herder's source of income and to promote tourism in the region. Some of the planned activities include yak riding around Meri Puensum and yak recreational sport in Chelela. The highlanders also proposed to use their horses for transportation services for tourists within the dzongkhag to generate income.

Initially three households would run the highland shop for three years and they would contribute a certain percentage from their income to the Co-operative. There had also been some discussion about formalising a yak's network to promote the trans-boundary co-operation on yak value chain development. This would help the highland communities to be represented at a local, regional, and international level rather than in small groups. Yak herding has been on the decline as many young people do not want to be involved in yak herding practices, despite being part of a herder's family. It is hoped that the Government might make plans and projects to help the primary yak herders. While it is necessary to have a yak product supply chain, and the shop will help with that objective, preserving the size of the herding community was also a major priority.

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### NOTE

*If you have not done so already, please send your e-mail address to ***rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com*** 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.*

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