

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

WINTER 2009

Earthquake caused extensive damage in rural Bhutan

On September 21 2009, an earthquake measuring 6.3 on the Richter scale hit Bhutan at around 2.53 in the afternoon. The epicentre was somewhere between Trashigang and Mongar. It has claimed the lives of 12 people and 37 people were reported injured. The earthquake also damaged many buildings including nearly 4,000 homes, schools and other public buildings.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Lyonchhoen Jigmi Y Thinley in his briefing to representatives of international agencies in Bhutan said, "It's an enormous figure for Bhutan and this disaster has struck the rural parts of the country."

A six-member team from the UN and the World Bank is already assessing the damage of the earthquake in the six eastern dzongkhags and will be putting together both medium and long term rehabilitation plans and associated cost estimates.

The Prime Minister also told representatives that the disaster management team at the local and central level would now be strengthened. "We've realised that more efforts are needed to set up formal linkages with international institutions for scientific and management science for early warning or advice," he said. "We're also reviewing constructions codes and a technical team is working on mapping fault lines for the entire country." Besides mapping the fault lines, the team is also preparing a landslide inventory which will help plan new development activities and building structures in those areas.

EARTHQUAKE APPEAL

The Fifth Druk Gyalpo, HM Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, has established an appeal, The People's Welfare Fund, to provide assistance to those worst affected by the disaster. Members and friends of the Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom have responded with great generosity and raised £16,500. Most of this contribution was handed over to the Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering, by the Society's Chairman, Mr Michael Rutland, on November 23rd.

THANK YOU

"I am sure we are all very pleased our Society was able to help in a meaningful way and there will be many who will be grateful to all the donors. Let us hope that rebuilding can be done before winter snow comes to the higher ground to bring even more hardship."

**Sir Simon Bowes Lyon
President. The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom**



News and Updates

A new kind of a bakery in Thimphu

Located in Kawanjangsa in Thimphu, Big Bakery was formally opened at the end of July. It is a special bakery. A special bakery, because, the bread, biscuits and the cakes sold here are baked by physically disadvantaged children. It was established by Draktsho Vocational Training Institute. Speaking at the opening, Ms Jigme Wangmo from the Institute said the Bakery will provide gainful employment for Draktsho graduates. The Bakery is already a success with guests who gathered at the opening. Currently seven physically disadvantaged children work with the Bakery. They were trained by Mr. Seikson, a Japanese expert in food processing .



This success story is of particular interest because of its links with the Society's Trust Fund. Each year the Bhutan Society Trust Fund receives a number of diverse requests for funding and one such application in 2008 came from the Draktsho Vocational Centre for the Disabled (DVTCD). DVTCD was started in 2001 by Ms Jigme Wangmo as a service-oriented and non-profit making centre. It is the first of its kind in Bhutan, and aspires to enhance the living standards of disabled youth by training and eventual integration with the main-stream population. Its principle focus is to equip the trainees with vocational skills to enhance their opportunities for gainful employment. One of the greatest challenges for the centre is to erase the deeply embedded stigma that disabled people are less fortunate and unproductive members of the community. The Centre currently has 36 students in total.

Recognising that employment opportunities for DVTCD students, especially the intellectually challenged, were virtually non-existent, Ms Jigme Wangmo conceived a project to provide real opportunities - namely a Sheltered Employment Scheme for a Bakery - inspired by sheltered bakeries she had visited in Japan. Ms Jigme Wangmo expressed hope that the Big Bakery will encourage private entrepreneurs to come up with similar ventures.

All Society Trustees were agreed that this was a project worthy of support and decided to provide a grant of £4,000 for the purchase of a suitable piece(s) of equipment for the Bakery. In April 2009 the grant was used to purchase two refrigerated cabinets, a fridge, a hot water geyser and steel racks for storing bread. The Society's Chairman, Mr Michael Rutland, reports that Big Bakery is open and fully operational and, in addition to supplying fresh bread to local businesses, Big Bakery runs a small coffee shop. Members of the Bhutan Society visiting Thimphu would be made most welcome.

Banknotes of Bhutan

Co-authored and published by Anil R.Bohora and Gylfi K. Snorrason, Nashik 2009. c140 pages, profusely illustrated.



Banknotes were first issued in Bhutan in 1974, to coincide with the coronation of the fourth King, but they already attract a considerable collecting interest. This interest has been reflected in this fine book, which is more than just a listing of the forty one different types of banknote that have been produced to date. It describes and explains the designs, identifies the signatories and the issuing authorities. It also details the printers used to print the notes, in India, the UK and in Korea, and points out the various security features that have been used to discourage forgery. It illustrates various other more detailed varieties which are of interest mainly to collectors, such as prefix letters, from which number issued can be estimated, replacement notes, specimen notes, etc. The high quality colour pictures of every Bhutanese banknote issued to date, makes this an interesting and attractive read for anybody interested in the culture and history of Bhutan.

Nicholas Rhodes

THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE BHUTAN SOCIETY

More than 100 members and friends along with guests enjoyed what again proved to be a most memorable evening at The Travellers Club in London on October 9th. This was a particularly special occasion as we were joined by a number of very distinguished guests from Bhutan including:

HRH Prince Jigyel Ugyen Wangchuck

HE Dasho Sonam Tobden Rabgye, Ambassador to the EU

Tobgay Sonam Namgyel, Prince Jigyel's secretary

Lieutenant Namgze Dorji, Prince Jigyel's ADC

Dorji Namgyel, Director of the Ta Dzong Museum, Trongsa

Twelve students currently in the UK also attended as guests.

As can be seen in the photographs below an enjoyable time was had by all!



Next Meeting

Wednesday 17th March, 2010. 6.30pm for 7.00pm. Oriental Club, Stratford Place, London WC1 1ES

“ Film Making in Asia and Bhutan ”

The speaker, Mr. Jonathan Elliott, is a consultant with Elliott Media, a company concerned with TV journalism and production. Mr. Elliott will be talking about a film director's work, with reference to his 20 years of film production. In this lecture he will talk about his experiences of film making in Asia, with particular reference to Bhutan, with possible clips from some of his films.

Drinks available before the lecture

Please note: Oriental Club rules require gentlemen to wear jacket and tie. No jeans!

AGM Report ***The AGM of the Society took place in London on 10th September 2009. The event was well attended and Minutes of the Meeting are enclosed.***

NEWS FROM THE

The decline of the phallus

Phalluses painted on walls, suspended above doors or hanging from roof corners in rural Bhutan are a remarkable sight for all. Until recently, these lively signs were visible throughout the country.

Now the wooden phallus and phallus decorations are fading from urban Bhutan, as it undergoes prudish self-censorship. This trend in urban areas seems set to continue unless the long hand of government extends to save them from extinction. Phallic signs have also been 'suppressed' from community temples and dzongs.

However, any self-respecting rural house containing religious artifacts will feature an impressively long wooden phallus, attached in the middle at right angles to a wooden dagger, hung from each roof corner. House painting has to follow strict patterns but, in phallic paintings, painters can reveal their imagination in the phalluses' devastating size, colour and variety and in embellishment. Some phalluses are even endowed with a pair of benign and comic eyes.

For villagers, these sights come to be like that of any other household wares, nothing shocking. This art form, which is both beautiful and banal, is unusual in the rest of the world. At a popular level, the beholders of phallic images consider them as banal but fundamental aspects of life.

In educational terms, the images are also about acceptance, without shame or guilt. A child growing up understanding such images probably gains earlier and more realistic adaptations.

A common view is that when slanderous people, or those who bear us ill will, see a phallus, they are overcome by shame and embarrassment, and are unable to cause us harm. This view led people to pin wooden phalluses in such highly visible places.

New newspaper launched

The nation's first financial paper, **Business Bhutan** was launched in October. The 32-page weekly English newspaper and the eight-page free Dzongkha pull-out will reach the readers every Saturday. **Business Bhutan**, which is published from Thimphu, is priced at Nu. 15 and has six colour pages. The main 24 pages cover local and international financial news as well as general stories from around the nation.

"It is very important to make this paper a credible source of information that people can refer to," said Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Works and Human Settlement Minister, at the launch event in Thimphu.

With 34 employees, **Business Bhutan** is the smallest newspaper company in Bhutan. The eight reporters, who come from diverse backgrounds, have all undergone a two-month training. The paper has some new components such as the prices of essential commodities from different parts of the country and also, for example, the prices of different varieties of rice in all major dzongkhags.

Encouraging young readers

Business Bhutan has also introduced the "Newspapers in Education" program where students are trained to research, observe, and write on events happening in and around their school in a news article style. A whole

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broad-sheet colour page is devoted to each school, where students conduct survey analysis, write editorials, take photographs, interview people and write news stories.

"It is hard work, but the amazing response we are getting from educational institutions and parents is very encouraging," said Tshering Wangchuk, chief executive officer for the newspaper. "There is no greater socially responsibility than helping our future leaders to express themselves," he added.

Drukair launches new online system

Flying with the national airline Drukair can sometimes be an arduous affair. But the chances of your Drukair experience being a pleasurable one may have just increased with the airline launching a new online information, reservation and ticketing service during the summer. Services available include online



reservations, electronic ticketing, accessibility to air fares and real time seat availability.

Also available are departure control services which include

checking in before your departure date, not just for Drukair, but for any airline that is a member of IATA (International Air Transport Association).

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Encouraging junior golf

With 3 nine-hole golf courses and approximately 200 golfers, Bhutan is very much an emerging golfing nation, but with junior programmes like the Bhutan Youth Golf Association (BYGA), the game is developing rapidly.

The R&A which is golf's worldwide governing body and committed to working for golf, has supported the BYGA with the provision of 20 sets of clubs and annual grants of £5,000 since 2005. The programme, aimed at Bhutanese schoolchildren, provides equipment, two-hour weekly lessons, a full-time coach from the USA, competitions, and educational and cultural field trips to benefit the youngsters in all aspects of their lives, not just their golf.

The BYGA now has a paid staff and conducts daily clinics in Thimphu and regular workouts in other cities around Bhutan. "Many Bhutanese children are being introduced to the game through the good work of both the Bhutan Golf Federation and the BYGA," added The R&A's Director for the Asia- Pacific region, Dominic Wall

"I was impressed with many of the juniors in the BYGA programme and would not be surprised if some of them develop into very good players."

In 2008 Royal Thimphu received US\$20,000 from The R&A for course improvements. "Royal Thimphu Golf Club occupies a spectacular location overlooking the National Parliament and King's office," said Wall. "This is certainly a hidden gem and well worth a visit."

What can you get with Nu.100 in Thimphu?

Traditionally a kilogramme of beef with Nu.10 to spare for a kilogramme of fresh green chillies grown in the Wangdue-Punakha valley.

But not so this summer. Many Thimphu residents wondered whether it was better to buy meat than to pay out all Nu.100 for chillies alone. During the summer chillies normally become cheaper but heavy rainfall damaged a large quantity ready to be harvested, so supply has been limited.



One vendor said that a sack of chillies, weighing between 35-45 kg, cost her Nu.2,200. "The supply is less compared to a few weeks back and the price has gone up. Last week, I paid Nu.1,500 a sack." Record high temperatures and low rainfall this summer has also resulted in increased cost of other vegetables. According to one vendor in Thimphu a sack (around 55 kg) of potatoes cost about Nu.800 this year, up from Nu.300 a few years back and onions and tomatoes had also gone up significantly in price.

Action over prayer flags

The Bhutanese Government has warned its citizens not to cut down thousands of young trees every year to make poles for hoisting Buddhist prayer flags. The flags are flown by Himalayan Buddhists to help the dead find the right path in their next life. They believe that the more flag poles put up for the departed the better. Government figures show that between June 2007 to June 2008, 60,178 trees - about 165 every day - were felled to meet the demand for poles. Buddhist monks say fresh poles must be used each time. "If you reuse an old flag pole, you aren't putting in enough effort, which means the merit earned is compromised," Buddhist monk Gyem Tshering told Kuensel. "Ideally, you should hoist 108 flags, but if you can afford more, it'll help the dead find the right path."

Officials warn that this approach means that most of Bhutan's forest will be gone within the next 20 years and the problem has become so serious that forestry officers in Thimphu have restricted the number of prayer flags posts to 29. Plans are also afoot to persuade people to switch to bamboo for prayer flags, but a similar initiative recently launched to encourage people to use steel was unsuccessful. Bhutan's constitution, which emphasises the importance of Gross National Happiness over Gross Domestic Product, stipulates the country must have at least 60% forest cover.

CALLING ALL DOCTORS!

The Society would like to know of any doctors, either GP or specialist, active or retired, who would be interested in working in Bhutan as volunteers in the Health Sector for periods of one year. This is a great opportunity to both gain experience of working in a rapidly developing service and to contribute specialist medical skills. For more information contact Michael Rutland on rutland.michael@googlemail.com

REPORT ON 'DRAGONS GIFT' EXHIBITION

It gave me great pleasure to have been asked to organize an excursion for the Bhutan Society to the "Dragon's Gift" Exhibition in Paris. The Curator of the Exhibition, Mme. Nathalie Bazin, guided us with expert knowledge, great enthusiasm and fine affinity through the sacred art and iconography of Bhutan.

The Exhibition explores Bhutan's cosmology by showing more than one hundred works of art, like Thangkas, sculptures, metalwork, textiles and many ritual objects. The exhibits date from the 8th to the 19th century and all have a complex and subtle iconography. It also introduces key Buddhist masters in Bhutan's history, like Padmasambhava (who introduced Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century), Pema Lingpa 1450-1521 (the famous tertön and treasure revealer), the Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (the unifier of Bhutan as a religious state in the 17th century), and - of course - the Buddha Sakyamuni (the historical Buddha who found enlightenment in India). In addition there were numerous Bodisatvas - (the most revered in Bhutan is Avalokitesvara) and the Protective Deity of Bhutan: the raven-haired Mahakala. Dance, which plays an important part in Tantric Buddhism, is also evoked via display of clips of film made in Bhutan. This Exhibition offers a unique opportunity for the general public to discover the major iconographical themes of Tantric Buddhism, Bhutan's official religion, and it was well worth the effort of travelling to Paris to see these great exhibits.

"Visit was a great success - thank you

At 08.32 on 17th November the Eurostar train for Paris departed St. Pancras, carrying 24 excited people. We then travelled by coach from the Gare du Nord to a restaurant for a delicious and convivial lunch, from where we walked, but briefly, to the Musée Guimet. Several hours later we emerged after a spell-binding tour. More magic was to come with the return journey through a city classically clothed in its Christmas decorations. It was a memorable day and I, on behalf of all those who attended, would like to put on record our thanks to Baroness Friesen for organising so superbly such a momentous occasion."

**John Davey, Vice Chairman,
The Bhutan Society of the UK**

Baroness Dorothea von Friesen

Sithar Dorji: 7th February 1972 to 9th July 2009

This young man was a breath of fresh air. Passionate about orchids, he worked on Bhutan's first collection then set up a collection in the National Botanic Garden. He studied every dimension he could with a view to collecting, displaying and cataloguing the orchids of his country. His studies took him to Thailand, Japan and the UK. Travelling around Bhutan, collecting and cataloguing, he also photographed and identified what he found. Amongst them was one he had discovered in the Mongar district, which he thought was a new species. This was confirmed and is named *Pecteilis Rafinesque sithari* (as yet unpublished).



In December 2006, whilst studying at RHS Wisley, he was diagnosed with a brain tumour, the prognosis was not good. During his time in hospital and subsequent treatment his sense of character, humour and good spirit did not abate. His determined attitude, cheekiness and sense of purpose did not leave him. He had amazing stamina, the will to live, and remained positive throughout. He was determined to finish the course before returning to Bhutan and his wife Sonam, two daughters and a son, where he then completed a 97-page paperback book with colour photography, 'The Field Guide to the Orchids of Bhutan'. Despite his illness, despite further surgery and treatment, despite being tired and gradually losing control of his body, unable in the last weeks to even talk, he managed to complete this task before, sadly, he died on 9th July 2009. This brave man's spirit will live on not only in the hearts of his friends and family, who will sorely miss him, but in 'his' orchid and the book he managed to write. As the Buddhists of Bhutan say, "May his soul live in peace and be reborn in a better living being".

Jessica Beaghen

Profile: Bhutanese in the UK

Continuing our series of profiles of Bhutanese studying and/or working in the UK. Karma Jigme talks about his life and experiences here.

1. Which part of Bhutan are you from?

I am from Paro, but I now live and work in Thimphu.

2. Where have you studied? And which subjects have you concentrated upon?

I graduated from Fergusson College, India with Botany as a major and completed an MSc in Forestry from Indira Gandhi National Forestry Academy, India. Currently I am pursuing a Post-graduate diploma in International Wildlife Conservation Practice at Oxford University, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU). This course places emphasis on field research on wild cats (tigers, lions, snow leopards etc).

3. Where have you worked and what is your present job?

I am working as a Forestry Officer for the Nature Conservation Division (NCD). I look after the CITES unit (Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species), the anti-poaching programme and also carry out research. Prior to that I was working in the Territorial Division, which is the division that looks after forests outside the protected areas.



4. So you have moved your focus from forestry to broader aspects of conservation?

It is important to understand both forestry and wildlife to save either. Knowing a bit on wildlife will certainly complement my knowledge on plants and forestry and will probably make me a better conservationist.

5. Has the course lived up to your expectations?

WildCRU has so much to offer when it comes to wildlife conservation. The course is very practical and the learning environment is perfect. We, the students, are affectionately called WildCRU Panthers. We come from different continents so we have a wealth of field experiences and many interesting stories to share.

6. What will you be doing when you return to Bhutan?

I will continue working with the NCD and carry out research on wildlife.

7. You have left your wife and baby daughter in Thimphu, how have you kept in touch with them?

Obviously the SKYPE, but unfortunately the busy schedule and time difference, restricts us to chat on weekends only.

8. Have you seen much of the UK and what do you miss of Bhutan?

A week's break between each course has helped me to get the feel of the UK, especially London. Oxford is also such a beautiful place but I do miss my family and the beautiful mountains of Bhutan.

Anniversary of Bhutan Broadcasting Services

Summer 2009 saw the 10th anniversary of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) being celebrated with the official opening of a newly constructed headquarters in Thimphu by HRH Ashi Chimi Yangzom Wangchuck. Since the launch of TV and Internet in Bhutan on 2nd June 1999, which coincided with the Silver Jubilee Celebration of the 4th Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, radio and television broadcasting has slowly gained momentum. In February 2005 BBS by satellite was launched which enabled services to be accessed throughout Bhutan for the first time. After 37 years of public service broadcasting it has grown from 1 hour of radio to 15 hours a day in four languages – and television has expanded from broadcasting just 3 hours a day in 1999 to 5 hours in 2009. There are now eight regional bureaux in Bumthang, Geleghpug, Mongar, Phuentsholing, S/Jongkhar, Samtse, Trashigang and Tserang, all feeding local news to the BBS headquarters in Thimphu. The new building now contains the TV news department, programme production and technical departments as well as the main television studio.



It is equipped with state of the art facilities and certainly very different to the first small radio station opened in 1973 in a wooden hut in Taba. BBS receives very generous assistance and much valued financial and technical support from India, Denmark, France, Japan and Germany. The ability of BBS to cover such historic events as the Coronation in 2008 was clearly demonstrated, and its role as a public service broadcaster, free of party political interests, will become of increasing importance. However with the rapid development of the country, BBS will continue to face many challenges as it matures into the complex role of informing, educating and entertaining the people of Bhutan and beyond.

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NOTE

Prior to the recent lecture by Dr Leatham, we sent out a number of reminders to those members who had given us their e-mail addresses. Many of those contacted told us they had appreciated being told of a very enjoyable lecture that otherwise they would have missed.

Unfortunately only about 45% of the names on our database have your latest e-mail address. If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending an e-mail to the Membership Secretary lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com who will then add your current e-address 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, as was the case with Dr Leatham's lecture

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