

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 43

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

WINTER 2010

Visit the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew

Tuesday 8 February 2011 10.45am – 2pm approx.

Here is your opportunity to find out about the skills of Kew's orchid growers and the techniques they use to care for Kew's diverse collection. Mr Andre Shuiteman, Senior Researcher at Orchidacea Kew will take us through the orchid nursery, normally not open to the public.

This visit has also been arranged to coincide with the "Tropical Extravaganza" Exhibition starting on February 7th in the Princess of Wales Conservatory. The steamy interior of the Conservatory will be brimming with thousands of orchids and tropical flowers, This year it promises to be more colourful than ever before!

Mr. Shuiteman will answer any questions and of course give expert advice about buying and growing orchids. After a tour and talk of approx. 1hr 45 min. lunch, including a glass of wine, will be arranged at Kew's Orangery restaurant. Before you leave you may also wish to purchase a prize specimen of your own at the Victoria Plaza at Kew.

Price will be confirmed once level of interest established. Members will need to make their own way to and from Kew. Directions on how to get there are given on their web site www.kew.org.

Please contact Dorothea von Friesen on dorryfriesen@yahoo.org before 28th January if you wish to join the visit. As the group is limited to 20, do try and book early!



Thursday 17 February 2011

6.30pm for 7pm

'Bhutan and the Shifting Dynamics of China-India Relations'

It was clear from Michael Rutland's annual review to The Society last September that Bhutan's geographical location has become even more significant as its two giant neighbours, China and India, are set to be key players in world politics. It is therefore timely to ask what is the significance of the rise of China and India, and of shifting dynamics of Sino-Indian relations on the geopolitics of Himalayan regions in general and Bhutan in particular?

These and other questions will be addressed by the speaker, **Dr. Dibyesh Anand**, who is Associate Professor in International Relations at the University of Westminster, London. He is the author of 'Geopolitical Exotica: Tibet in Western Imagination' (University of Minnesota Press, 2007) and 'Hindu Nationalism in India and the Politics of Fear'.

Meeting will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE (off Whitehall)

With such a topical subject, several other organisations and societies with interests in China, India and Bhutan, have been advised of this event and invited to attend.

News and Updates

Meeting of the Bhutan Friendship Societies in Europe

Mantua in Northern Italy was the venue for the sixth biennial meeting of the various friendship societies in European countries. The meeting was hosted this year by Amici del Bhutan Italia. Delegates from nine countries met in Mantua on 24 and 25 September 2010: France, Germany, Greece, Italy, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Austria. HE Dasho Sonam Tobden Rabgye, Bhutan's Ambassador to the EU, and Mr Phuchu Dukpa of the Division for Conservation of Heritage Sites, Ministry of Home & Cultural Affairs attended. The Bhutan Society of the UK was represented by Committee members - Michael Rutland, Dorothea von Friesen and Andrew Sutton.



Business sessions allowed the societies to report upon and discuss their activities in Europe and in Bhutan. As the meeting was held at the architecture department of the University of Mantua and the President of the Italian society, Professor Maddalena Fortunati, has special interest in Bhutanese architecture, there were several presentations on the design and construction of Bhutanese buildings – sacred and secular, traditional and current – to which fifty or more university students were also invited. The next meeting will be in London in 2012 around the time of the annual dinner of the Society. Leaders of all European societies will be invited.

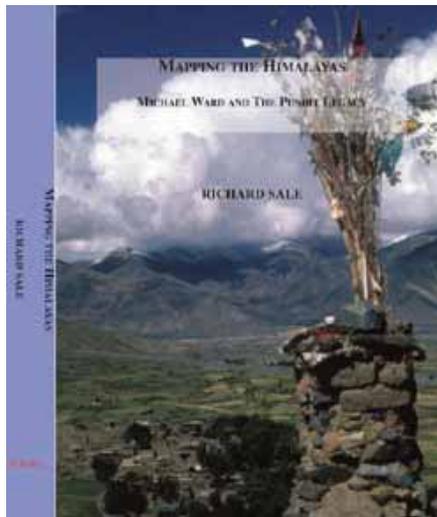
Campaign for UN Security Council has begun in earnest

When a small country like Bhutan, with no established economic or political leverage at the international arena, vies for a membership in the UN Security Council (2013), many would misconstrue this as attempting the impossible. Not the Prime Minister, though. Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley said it is time Bhutan contributes to promote peace and security in the world as a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) member.

During the PM.'s visit to New York in October 2010 for the United Nations (UN) summit, he proposed Bhutan's membership to the UN Security Council in 2013. The lobbying has begun in earnest.

"We are really going to do this. We may get it. We may not get it. But the important thing is that presenting our candidature for the Security Council and then campaigning for it is a sign of Bhutan having come of age politically as an equal member as any other country," said the Prime Minister.

Sale, Richard. *Mapping the Himalayas: Michael Ward and the Pundit Heritage*. Carreg Publishing, 2009



This book, begun by Michael Ward (of the 1951 and 1953 Everest expeditions), was completed by Richard Sale. The book keeps to Ward's original plan, beginning with details of early journeys made by Europeans to the Himalayan kingdoms, before moving on to the work of the Survey of India (precursor to the work of the Pundits). The Pundits are then covered individually, with such biographical information as is known and details of their journeys. Michael Ward was

interested in both the work of the Pundits and their techniques. During his involvement with the 1951 Everest Reconnaissance expedition, he undertook survey work, the results of which were incorporated into maps of the region. Later, on two trips to Bhutan as a medical advisor to the king, he was given permission to trek in the remote Lunana district and used Pundit techniques to prepare the first accurate map of the area. The two chapters on Michael Ward's time on Everest in 1951 and Bhutan in 1964 & 1965, draw extensively on his diaries of these trips, making available information for the 1951 Everest expedition not published before, and reproducing survey maps that Ward produced on these occasions.

Further information from: www.meridianrarebooks.co.uk

MEETING REPORT

Tiger Conservation in Bhutan

On September 28th, 2010, many members and friends of the Society were pleased to be able to attend a meeting in London where the speaker Lhendup Tharchen, co-ordinator of the Carnivore Conservation Programme in Bhutan, spoke about wildlife conservation and specifically on how the tiger conservation programme was working. This is a summary of his lecture.

The turn of the 20th century saw an estimated number of wild tigers as an encouraging 100,000 that comprised of eight sub-species. Five sub-species survived, but three faced extinction by 1980s. These magnificent big cats majestically inhabited a range across Asia to the Russian Far East. But habitat fragmentation, poaching and illegal trade in tiger parts/trophies have relentlessly pushed tigers into smaller and smaller enclaves, in smaller numbers, and to the verge of extinction today. We now have only about 3200 wild tigers struggling to survive and facing continued threats.



Bhutan is a conservation paradise with both strong political commitment and people's support and participation in conservation practices. The Country's policy places a strong focus and gives top priority to nature and wildlife conservation. These are translated at all levels of government decision making. As a result of such policies, 100-150 majestic wild tigers roam with authority in the forests all over Bhutan. The habitat ranges from an elevation of 100m in the southern foothills to over 4300m in the snow covered regions in the northern part of the Country. Thus making Bhutan, "the hidden tiger land on the planet" and serving as the potential "tiger breeding nucleus" for the region. The success stories of tigers in Bhutan are the legacy from our fore fathers, who conserved and protected them since times immemorial. For centuries, a strong religious and cultural ethos based on Buddhism has

provided a safe refuge for this extraordinary richness of wild flora and fauna.

The tiger has played a vital role in many of the south Asian cultures. In Bhutanese culture and myths, *Guru Rinpoche*, legendary Buddhist master rode a flying tigress to reach *Taktshang* (Tigers nest) that turned to a seat for spreading Buddhism in the Country. It is also one of the four protector animals of our state religion - *Drukpa karjue*, the others being; Dragon, Garuda and Snow Lion. The three which are mythological are believed to have disappeared. Therefore, the tiger is religiously close to Bhutanese hearts and all efforts are made to support its existence.

These past legacies have been transferred to our present generations who continue to take pride in harbouring this majestic animal. Political support from the leaders and spiritual and compassionate spirit from the citizens is still very evident. The protection of nature and the environment is a pillar to promote *Gross National Happiness*, a guiding development philosophy of the Country. The conservation of big cats especially tigers, leopards and snow leopards that require large home ranges, is becoming increasingly difficult with an increasing human population, developmental activities, and increasing grazing pressures amongst others.

While Bhutan still boasts enough space and promising habitat to support a viable population of breeding tigers in the years to come, the challenges facing tiger conservation are not limited.

While strengths for conservation of tigers in Bhutan include people's support, of late, the increased intensity of livestock predation by tigers has become an issue of concern for its conservation because of the possible retaliatory killing of tigers by the affected owners of the livestock. In order to mitigate the livestock loss, the government initiated the livestock compensation scheme in 2002. In order to ensure the compensation scheme is sustainable, a new scheme of livestock insurance scheme has also been started. In Bhutan, tiger conservation is a priority and enjoys the highest legal status being listed in Schedule I of the Forest and Nature Conservation Act of Bhutan 1995, which provides protection status on par with the highest standards internationally. Despite the conservation challenges faced today in the world, Bhutan is still a safer place in the 21st century for tigers in particular and biodiversity in general.



NEWS FROM THE

New Landing Lights?



As the black-necked cranes arrive in Phobjikha valley this winter, they will have to adjust to a brighter habitat as the valley is being connected to mains electricity.

The valley was deprived of electricity, fearing that overhead electric lines would endanger the birds when they fly in and out of the valley. As an alternative, some five years ago, the villagers were provided with a solar light system. That lit their houses, but didn't serve any other purpose. However, last month the Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC) inaugurated the most expensive rural electricity project in the valley as the first 100 homes received electricity. "We had to adopt special and very expensive engineering designs like underground cabling and extraordinary protective devices because of this place being the habitat of black necked cranes," said Dasho Bharat Tamang, BPC Managing Director. About Nu 103M (1.6M euro) fund support from the Austrian development agency, and an additional amount of Nu 42M from the BPC, were allocated for the project that will electrify about 900 households by mid 2011. The project, initiated in 2008, had proved to be

three times more expensive. In addition to about 33 km of overhead network cables, about 13.5 km of high voltage network and 46.5 km of low voltage network were laid underground in the vicinity of the roosting areas of the cranes. The cables were laid at least one metre below ground.

Government actions challenged

In a landmark ruling on October 18th, the Royal High Court passed its verdict on Bhutan's first Constitutional case in favour of the Opposition Party. They had taken the Government, led by Prime Minister Lyonpo Jigme Y Thinley, to Court alleging actions which violated the Constitution.

The Opposition Party alleged that in revising taxes without passing the Bill through Parliament, the Government had violated the Constitution of Bhutan, which states that Money Bills and Financial Bills must be originated in the National Assembly and fulfil Parliamentary procedures.

Having found in favour of the Opposition, the Government took its appeal to the Supreme Court and their decision is awaited with interest.

In the meantime, the Government must stop implementing the tax revisions pending the required legislation being put before Parliament.

This is the first case in which the interpretation and the supremacy of the Constitution has been tested before the Judiciary. The Prime Minister, who was in Sri Lanka at the time, commented that 'the ruling was not what the Government had expected'.

Protecting local arts and crafts

Bhutanese arts and crafts, which have often fought a losing battle with imported handicrafts from Nepal and India, have now found a protected market.

This has been made possible with the Department of Cottage and Small Industry, in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Tourism Council and the Department of Agriculture Marketing and Cooperatives, starting a temporary craft bazaar at the Centenary Farmer's Market (CFM) recently. The craft bazaar, which will be open every Tuesday and Wednesday from 10 am till 7 pm, will be selling exclusively genuine Bhutanese arts and crafts and is opposed to any foreign arts and crafts. The Economics Affairs Secretary, Sonam Tshering, said the agencies are trying to identify a permanent site occupying about five acres for the craft bazaar. "If somebody is producing wood work, all the carvings could be done there and also be the marketing outlet," he said. "For the time being we're going to use the CFM, but hopefully over a period of time, we're going to create craft bazaars in various dzongkhags in the Country,"



The Secretary said that tourists usually depended on their guide, who often took them to a particular shop. "The tourist may or may not have a choice in selecting goods he or she likes. But at the bazaar they can choose," he said. However observers at the bazaar said that local crafts lack quality and were expensive. They said even with the

Government's protection and provision of a market, they will have to compete with imported goods. "In the end, tourists will look for quality, and price will be a major factor," said one tourist visitor.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Religious literature goes online

About 120,000 religious texts and books, which researchers and librarians call the national written heritage of Bhutan, are now accessible online worldwide, both in English and Dzongkha. The process of digitalising the national library's entire collections took 14 years. It was made possible through a joint research project between the National Library of Bhutan (NLB) and the Royal Library in Copenhagen, with support from Danida. "It's the largest data base on Tibetan and Chokye books," said Prof Dr PK Sørensen. "This is a huge achievement and it's been extremely successful." Completed in four phases, the project's main goal was to catalogue, survey and ensure the preservation of Bhutanese and Tibetan books at the National Library, and in temples and monasteries across the country. NLB today has instituted an automated library system to process library materials and provide public access to a database for cataloguing books. The system contains 7,534 records of foreign language books, 11,800 records of Chokye and Dzongkha, 3,175 records of microfilms, 64 archival



materials and 423 records of legal deposits. The data base is however still hosted in Denmark.

As of September this year, the project has surveyed temples, monasteries and dzongs of 12 dzongkhags and registered over 4,000 titles. Rare documents (over 400 titles) are digitalised and stored on CD ROMS. Besides publishing several books, the project also helped procure wooden shelves with shutters to protect books from dusts on all its three floors, and replaced the cement floors with wood.

Despite all these achievements, officials are worried that the library should not turn into a museum. "What's missing so far is the greater accessibility to these resources by the common people and students," Prof Dr Sørensen said. "It's not used to the extent it should be, which is a great tragedy. The only people, who are accessing the library collections are researchers, monks and a few civil servants, who love reading Buddhist texts. It's difficult for others, because the younger generation have problems identifying and reading Chokye and Bhutanese texts," the professor said. "However we hope to have lectures and workshops to attract young people."

Selling tradition and culture short

If you are "lucky", you don't have to wait for the annual tshechu to see a mask dance. With more and more tourists visiting the Country, tour operators and hoteliers now have mask dances on the itinerary even if it is not the tshechu season. All you have to do is be at the right place at the right time. But the ad-hoc mask dances to please tourists for a few dollars has not gone down well with some sections of society. The debate over performing mask dances for tourists is not new. People have already questioned whether Bhutan's unique culture, of which mask dances are an important part, should be commercialised. It was brought up many times when students performed mask dances at school concerts, when school fetes had it on the entertainment item list, and when performed for tourists. Festival season in Bhutan is one of the biggest tourist attractions, but when tourists come at other times, sometimes tshechu dates are adjusted to the suit visitor timetables.

However in Bhutan, mask dances are sacred and there are appropriate times and place where they are performed. During a tshechu, the monk body conducts days of rituals before dances are performed for the public. This is because it is not just any dance. The mask, dress and even the steps and music come with spiritual significance. People, who witness mask dances, fold their hands, pray and make wishes, because they are holy and sacred. Mask dances are not musical shows, so one has to ask if performing ad-hoc mask dances in front of tourists are appropriate. Is there a danger in trading the unique culture and tradition of Bhutan to a value that is more associated with revenue?



FANCY A GAP-YEAR EXPERIENCE IN BHUTAN ?

The Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan's first independent University College, has announced that as from March 2011, it will be offering a unique structured gap year experience based at the College. It will include academic learning, cultural immersion, adventure travel, local involvement and a wide variety of other exciting experiences from meditation to mountain trekking and white water rafting. It is aimed at young people from the United Kingdom and elsewhere aged between 18 and 21, and the basic programme extends over three months.



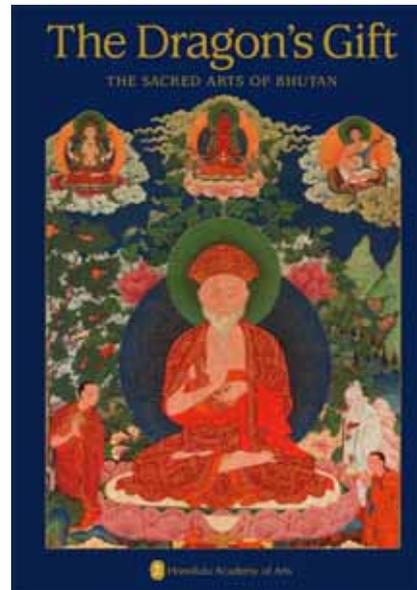
Participants will live at the newly-built College, situated on its own campus a few miles from Thimphu, along with over 700 Bhutanese students who are

already there studying full-time courses. During the stay the College will organize trips and activities so that visiting students can get a taste of Bhutan's rich history, culture and traditions, including visits to dzongs, religious festivals, museums and social events. At a more personal level, students will also have the opportunity to contribute their skills and perspectives toward the development of Bhutan through a variety of possible internships and volunteer projects. This will be a unique opportunity to be living in one of the world's youngest democracies, a fascinating prospect for anyone interested in politics, sociology or anthropology. There will be also the experience of seeing how the adjustment to a new democratic political system is taking place and how the Country is preparing for its second ever election. The College will also provide Dzongkha lessons as part of the study programme. Programmes are planned for March 1-May 7 2011, and from May 8-July 15 2011. The basic cost of the programme is around £3,450, excluding travel to Bhutan. Places are strictly limited to a maximum of 15 participants during 2011.

Members of the Society are asked to publicise this unique opportunity to friends, relatives and anyone they know who may be interested. Initial enquiries to Michael Rutland, via email to 'rutland.michael@gmail.com'

The 'Dragon's Gift' arrives home safely

After almost three years, the 111 religious artifacts that were on display around the world were recently returned home to Bhutan - safe and sound. The artifacts, comprising 46 religious objects, including statues, and 65 thangkas, travelled to the United States, France, Germany and Switzerland. Several members of the Society were fortunate to visit the exhibition whilst in Paris some months ago.



"It feels good to bring back home the artifacts with all their qualities and values intact," said Tshewang Gyalpo, the Chief Cultural Property Officer and Coordinator of The Dragon's Gift Exhibition. With an objective to celebrate the 2008 Coronation, centenary and democratic transition, the artifacts

were collected from 36 dzongs, community lhakhangs and individuals. "We also believe that such sacred relics are not just for Bhutan, but are important to share with the entire world," he said, adding that the artifacts were selected, considering their artistic, sacred and aesthetic qualities. Now it is the turn of those in Bhutan to see these artifacts. They will be exhibited in Thimphu, Trongsa and in Trashigang over the next couple of months before being returned to their original communities.

The Music of Bhutan Research Centre (MBRC) was founded in 2008 to document, preserve and promote the traditional music of Bhutan. MBRC aims to break new ground by professionally researching, recording and archiving the many musical traditions of the country's diverse regional linguistic and ethnic groups and by documenting the finest living music musicians in performance and interviews. As a result of its work the Centre has just published its first booklet and CD 'Masters of Bhutanese Traditional Music' - Volume one. (ISBN 978-0-615-40583-4). Further information on: www.musicofBhutan.org

THE ANNUAL DINNER OF THE BHUTAN SOCIETY

Sixty three members and guests met and enjoyed a memorable evening at the Travellers Club in London on 17 September for the 18th Annual Dinner of the Society. After gathering for drinks in the Inner Morning Room, the party moved to dinner in the Club's Library which proved to be a delightful location for the event.



His Excellency DASHO SONAM TOBDEN RABGYE, Bhutan's Ambassador to the EU, and his wife AUM YANGCHEN were our chief guests. Nine Bhutanese students also attended as guests. Thanks are due to all those members who generously contributed to the costs of the dinner on behalf of the students.

New York exhibition of historical photographs explores the fascinating story of John Claude White

A British Life in a Mountain Kingdom: Early Photographs of Sikkim and Bhutan is the first exhibition of photographs by John Claude White. White, a British government officer and civil engineer, spent much of his career stationed in these places. This New York exhibition* presents original prints and large-scale reproductions from three important photography albums that will also be on view.

White's memoirs and body of work reveal his captivation with mountains from an early age. Though born in Calcutta, he spent his teenage years studying in Bonn, Germany in the 1880s, where he was undoubtedly intrigued by the recent "golden age" of mountaineering of the mid nineteenth century that saw the first ascents of many Alpine peaks. White was delighted therefore to be assigned to the Sikkim-Tibet Boundary Commission, where he would map and survey the regions' borders. His images have an intimate quality and beautifully represent the mountains and architecture he loved, and those whom he came to consider companions and friends. Particularly unique was his friendship with King Ugyen Wangchuk of Bhutan. One photograph taken in Bhutan



in 1907 during the celebration for the King of Bhutan's coronation, shows White sitting by the King and members of his delegation. On the surface, the groups could not look more different, yet they are there, together. It serves as a visual representation of the two worlds that White successfully straddled during his unique career.

**Rubin Museum of Art (RMA) holds one of the world's most important collections of Himalayan art. Paintings, pictorial textiles, and sculpture are drawn from cultures that touch upon the arc of mountains that extends from Afghanistan in the*

northwest to Myanmar in the southeast and includes Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia, and Bhutan.

'A British Life in a Mountain Kingdom: Early Photographs of Sikkim and Bhutan' will be on view until January 10, 2011 at the RMA in New York. Gallery admission is free to all on Fridays between 6pm and 10pm.

Fire disaster in Bumthang

In late October, in one of the worst major fire disasters in the country, almost half the Chamkhar town in Bumthang was completely burnt to the ground. According to Dzongkhag officials 59 buildings, including shops and hotels in the Chamkhar town, were burnt to ashes by a fire. Sadly two people were killed, another injured and 267 left homeless.



The Dzongkhag officials, Gyalpoi Zimpon officials, students, monks and public and fire fighters battled the fire through most of the night and it was eventually brought under control at around 5 am. Some eye witnesses said the fire started from nowhere and within a short period of time it had spread to other nearby shops and houses. Several cars were destroyed and many of the locals also lost all their belongings.

The Gyalpoi Zimpon office in Bumthang and dzongkhag office provided temporary shelter and food at Ugyen Wangchuck Stadium. To date insurance compensation is close to Nu. 3 million, but reports on damages are still being compiled. However it appears some families had not renewed their insurance cover.

On the command of His Majesty the King, the office for the Gyalpoi Zimpon in Bumthang delivered immediate relief materials to the victims and the Royal Bhutan Army assisted in these recovery works and with building several temporary shelters.

His Majesty the King, who was in India at the time of the fire, visited the area on his return to comfort the victims and to extend support to the families and all those affected in the local community.

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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:

lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.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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