

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



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.

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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