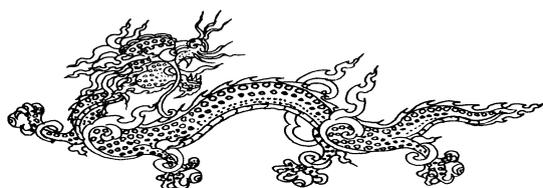


# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

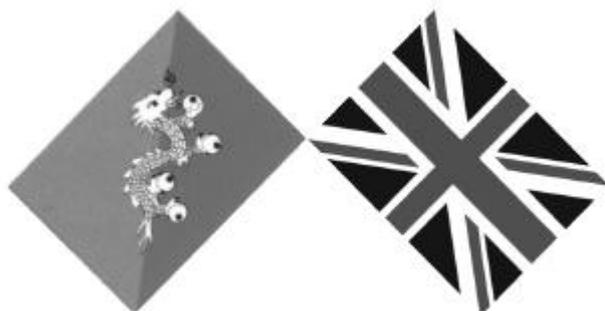
Number 23

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT, GCMG

July 2002

## The 10th Anniversary of the Bhutan Society 1992-2002

### The 10th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society of the UK



**Friday October 18th, 2002**

**In the State Apartments and Great Hall  
of the Royal Hospital Chelsea, London**

Please see enclosed flyer for application form.

Full details may be found on page 3.

### **Bhutan v. Montserrat 4 : 0!**

(see page 5 for the full story)

*Sponsorship pledges (see article to the right) may be for a single total amount, per kilometre (560), per hour (150) or per day (15). Monies will be collected following the walk and transferred to Bhutan as one sum, thus minimising bank charges.*

For further information on the walk please see the enclosed leaflet or contact:

Lucy Hornberger

Unit 23, 78 Marylebone High Street  
London W1U 5AP

Tel: (020) 7580 2617, Fax: (020) 7580 2648

E-mail: [lucy@globeflower.com](mailto:lucy@globeflower.com)

### **Sponsored Walk for Health Trust Fund**

*A message from His Excellency Bap Kesang, Ambassador,  
Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of Bhutan  
to the United Nations in Geneva*

In keeping with the theme for this year's World Health Day "Move for Health", His Excellency Lyonpo Sangay Ngedup, Minister for Health and Education, accompanied by a core team of 6 persons, will undertake a 15-day sponsored walk in September 2002. Starting in Trashigang and finishing in Thimphu, the route passes through difficult mountainous terrain and covers 560 kilometres.

The main purpose of the walk is to raise national awareness about a healthy lifestyle as well as to raise funds for the Bhutan Health Trust Fund. This Fund was launched in 1998 by the Royal Government of Bhutan to sustain free primary health care for the Bhutanese population.

We are seeking the sponsorship of individuals, communities, organizations and countries worldwide for this important undertaking. As well-wishers and good friends of Bhutan, we would like to invite members of the Bhutan Society to kindly consider joining other sponsors and thereby ensuring the success of the walk and the continued health care for the Bhutanese people. We would also be grateful if you could approach interested individuals or organizations who may support our campaign.

Further details on the walk and the Trust Fund, as well as information on how to remit contributions, are provided in the enclosed brochure. We will be happy to provide any additional information that you might require. Information is also available on the following websites: [www.move4health.gov.bt](http://www.move4health.gov.bt) and [www.bhtf.gov.bt](http://www.bhtf.gov.bt).

Thanking you and with best wishes,

Bap Kesang  
Ambassador

*To provide a simple way of sponsoring, Members are invited to pledge their support via the Bhutan Society. Please see the information to the left.*

For more on Bhutan's health services see pages 6 & 7.



# News & Updates from

## Bhutan Lecture in East Sussex

Bhutan Society members David Lang and David Nelson will be giving a lecture entitled *Return to the Dragon Kingdom* at Lewes Priory School on July 12, 2002. The lecture, organised by the Lewes Pestalozzi Support Group, is in aid of the Pestalozzi School. It is open to all and visitors are most welcome.

Time: 8:00 pm

Date: Friday July 12, 2002

Venue: Lewes Priory School  
Mountfield Road, Lewes  
East Sussex BN7 2XD

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## Proposed Bhutan Society website

The Bhutan Society is planning to go online with a new website to be launched in the Autumn.

The website will provide information about the Society and how to become a member, together with details of forthcoming events and an archive of past newsletters. We also plan to compile a list of useful Bhutan-related links and incorporate regular updates from Kuensel and other media about Bhutan.

What would you like to see on the website? Do you know of any particularly interesting or useful Bhutan-related links that you would like to share with other members? All input and suggestions will be most welcome. Please e-mail Bodo Hornberger at [bodo@globeflower.com](mailto:bodo@globeflower.com).

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will be in Bhutan until the end of July 2002, then in Guildford from 2 August until 18 September.

He will then be in Bhutan 19 September to 1 October, in Guildford 2 October to 23 October, and in Bhutan again from 27 October until the end of the year.

### *Guildford*

Address: 2 Windacres, Warren Road,  
Guildford GU1 2HG  
Tel: (01483) 538189  
E-mail: [mrutland@aol.com](mailto:mrutland@aol.com)

### *Bhutan*

Address: PO Box 1044, Thimphu, Bhutan  
Tel/Fax: +975-2-361185  
E-mail: [mrutland@aol.com](mailto:mrutland@aol.com)

Michael Rutland will be delighted to meet members of the Bhutan Society visiting Bhutan during the periods when he is there. Telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

## Polytunnel Appeal - Target Reached

Thank you so much to all of you who donated money to help restore the polytunnels in the Royal Botanic Garden, Thimphu. The target has been reached, and the money is on its way! I very much appreciate all your help with this project, as I know the Bhutanese also do.

I am now trying to gain sponsorship to return to Bhutan this year in late September/early October (by which time I will have graduated from RBG Kew) for two and a half months. As well as exploring the country further to study the flora and climatic zones, I hope also to have the opportunity to share some skills in the field with the staff at the Botanic Garden.

My plans include accompanying the staff on field trips when they are collecting plants for the Botanic Garden, and doing some 'in the field teaching' on the transplantation, rootballing and transportation of trees and other plants from the forests, and planting methods. In the Botanic Garden I hope to run workshops on propagation techniques such as cuttings and grafting, which I believe the staff will find useful and which will enable the full use of the polytunnels when the restoration is complete.

During this proposed trip I will be able to see how the restoration of the polytunnels is coming along, as well as what progress has been made on the herbarium, which was being built when I was there last year. I will keep you all posted as to how I get on, and on how the Botanic Garden is developing. I hope also to meet up with those of you who are travelling on the Bhutan Society trip this autumn.

This all depends on me being able to raise the funding needed and if any of you have any good ideas for sources of funding I would be really glad to hear from you!

Once again thank you all so much for your help with the polytunnel appeal. It has been a great success.

Jessica Beaghen

Tel.: (020) 8840 0829

E-mail: [jessicabeaghen@hotmail.com](mailto:jessicabeaghen@hotmail.com)

## STOP PRESS!

Jessica has just been informed that she has won the Ernest Thornton-Smith Travel Scholarship which is worth £2,000. This is wonderful news, however she still needs to raise a substantial amount. Do contact her if you can help.

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## Restaurant Review

Visitors to Bhutan should make a point of visiting the recently opened 'Seasons Restaurant' in Thimphu which serves delicious and convincingly Italian pizzas, real deep apple pie and excellent quiche.

It's to be found in a rapidly developing part of Thimphu locally nicknamed 'Hong Kong Market'. In the evening it even has candle lights on the tables! At the moment they don't do Yak Pizza, but it might do soon... Italian yaks??

MR



## The 10th Annual Dinner

Friday October 18th, 2002

Join us for this celebration of the Bhutan Society's 10th Anniversary in the presence of HRH The Crown Prince of Bhutan and in the company of the Presidents of the ten other European Bhutan Friendship Societies and Bhutan Society Member Joanna Lumley



### The Royal Hospital Chelsea

Designed by Sir Christopher Wren for Charles II, the Royal Hospital Chelsea is a very special venue at which to celebrate our 10th Anniversary.

The Hospital was founded in 1682 as a refuge for veterans of the army who required care, either on account of, injury or simply due to having reached retirement age. Today it continues to be a home for about 350 former soldiers – the famous Chelsea Pensioners – the oldest of whom served Britain in the armed forces in the First World War. The extensive grounds overlook the River Thames and are the venue for one of the biggest events of the London season, the Chelsea Flower Show.

The Annual Dinner will be held in the magnificent Great Hall, which is lined with portraits of royalty, including the famous mural of Charles II on horseback with the Royal Hospital buildings in the background. The size of the venue means that there will be plenty of room, and Members are encouraged to bring family and friends.

### Special Guests

Our guest of honour will be HRH The Crown Prince of Bhutan. The Presidents of the ten other European Bhutan Friendship Societies will also be present – from Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. Bhutan Society Member Joanna Lumley, most famous for her character Patsy Stone in the TV show *Absolutely Fabulous*, will also attend.

### Bhutanese Students

As in previous years, Bhutanese students studying in the UK will be invited to attend the Dinner as guests of the Bhutan Society.

Please consider sponsoring or part-sponsoring a ticket for a student. Your financial assistance is much appreciated!

### The Dinner

Following a Reception with sparkling wine, a three course dinner will be served. The dinner will be provided by one of London's leading caterers, the Crown Society Caterers, well known for the quality and presentation of their food. Wine, soft drinks, mineral water and tea/coffee are included in the price. A vegetarian menu may be ordered

Please see the enclosed flyer for a ticket application form for tickets. Completed forms should be returned together with payment to:

For applications to be received by September 22nd:

Mr. Peter Li  
'Tashi Delek', London Road  
Rake, Liss  
Hants GU33 7PQ  
Tel.: (01730) 893829

For applications after September 22nd:

Mr. Michael Rutland  
2 Windacres, Warren Road,  
Guildford GU1 2HG  
Tel.: (01483) 538189

**Venue:** State Apartments and Great Hall  
The Royal Hospital Chelsea  
London SW3 4SR  
(Nearest Tube station: Sloane Square)

**Time:** Reception 7:15 pm, Dinner 8:00 pm

**Tickets:** The cost for this seated, three-course dinner, including sparkling wine reception, wine, soft drinks, mineral water and tea/coffee, is £46.81 + VAT, plus a contribution of £4.50 to the Royal Chelsea Hospital Charity. The total price is **£59.50** per person. A vegetarian menu may be ordered.

**Dress:** Lounge suit or National Dress

**Parking:** Limited parking is available for an additional £1.50



# News from the

## New bypass eases the Sorchen problem

by Kinley Y. Dorji, Kuensel Online

An alternative route has been constructed to avoid the landslide-prone stretch at Sorchen on the Thimphu-Phuentsholing highway. The 1.8 kilometre bypass, constructed at a cost of Nu 23.8 million (£325,000), was inaugurated on May 18th by the deputy minister of communications, Dasho Leki Dorji.

The bypass, completed in partnership with India, is, according to chief engineer Brigadier Amitava Sarker, 'yet another symbol of friendship' between India and Bhutan. 'It will not only end the traffic disruptions at Sorchen, but



*Dasho Leki Dorji inaugurates the bypass*

also facilitate smooth flow of traffic, enabling increased trade and commerce', he said.

Speaking at the inauguration, Dasho Leki Dorji said the bypass will give another 'lifeline' to the Bhutanese people and greatly boost the confidence of the business sector. It will also enable perishable farm products from rural areas to reach the market on time, helping farmers to earn more. The bypass, however, has a limitation: it is suitable for light vehicles only. Its sharp curves are yet to be widened for the convenience of heavy vehicles.

Sorchen has posed problems to Bhutanese people since the first landslide in the area occurred in 1983. According to the project's engineers, the soil instability at Sorchen is caused by heavy rain and geological and climatic changes. 'The Himalaya, being a young fold mountain, is still growing and thus making the whole area unstable', said Brigadier Amitava.

Another reason for the Sorchen slide is the fast growing traffic on the highway. The narrow Thimphu-Phuentsholing highway was constructed in 1963 to cater to traffic of less than a hundred vehicles a day with a maximum carrying capacity of 8.5 metric tonnes. But more than 2,000 vehicles are plying daily on the highway today, carrying loads as heavy as 20 to 25 metric tonnes.

A project spokesman said that a huge budget is required to maintain the highway. The annual maintenance allowance of Nu 38,000 (£515) a kilometre is thus not enough. Sorchen, however, will cease to be a problem when the longer bypass, the Pasakha-Manitar road, is completed next year. The road is being built especially for heavy vehicles carrying equipment for the Tala hydroelectric project.

## Bhutan's cremation debate

by Ugyen Penjor / Kuensel Editorial

The new diesel-run incinerators at the Thimphu crematorium – touted as a cheaper, environment-friendly and less time consuming alternative to the traditional funeral process – were activated in May after consecration by His Holiness the Je Khenpo.

The incinerators have great advantages over the traditional funeral methods, consuming less fuel and generating less smoke and odour, and their use symbolises the surmounting of a major psychological barrier. But while the machines can drastically cut firewood consumption and save money and trouble for the bereaved families, the very idea of incinerating the bodies remains an aversion to the general Bhutanese population for whom funerals are deeply religious and emotional experiences.

According to 81-year-old Pem of Babesa, the idea is 'alien' and 'revolting'. 'I am afraid, I might not get the complete funeral rites', she lamented on being told of the change in the Duthroe (crematorium).

Another elder told Kuensel that she would be praying to die during the central monk body's annual stay in Punaka so that she can be cremated there (at a traditional crematorium). 'I am not happy with the news', she said, 'because even the dead deserve respect and complete funeral rites to be reborn as human'.

The secretary of the National Commission for Cultural Affairs (NCCA), Dasho Sangay Wangchuk, explained, however, that the spiritual and emotional interests of the deceased and their families had not been overlooked and that there was no question of bypassing the prayers and rituals of a revered tradition. 'The speed of the burners can be controlled until all the spiritual processes are completed and they can collect ashes and other remains like in the traditional pyres', he said. 'Besides', he added, 'we do not make it compulsory. People have a choice between the traditional and the mechanized incinerators'.

Thus the electronic crematorium does not circumvent any aspects of the traditional cremation ceremony. In fact the system is flexible enough to offer several advantages over wood fuel and enables the entire procedure to be closely controlled.

Thimphu's modernised crematorium represents the pragmatic evolution of Bhutanese tradition. Just as all Buddhist traditions evolved into different forms through history, Bhutan is adapting to the new times. As the old and new come together in pragmatic Bhutanese style, we are adopting modern technology, yet not alienating death. We are maintaining a system where we confront the process of death so that we appreciate life. The only religious way to think of death is as part and parcel of life.

Meanwhile, a new Mithrukpa Lhakhang (temple) will be built in the vicinity, to house about 50 monks. The monks will be stationed permanently at the cremation ground solely to conduct funeral rites for the public.

# Kingdom of Bhutan



## Crown Prince addresses the United Nations

*Kuensel Online*

**H**is Royal Highness Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck, Crown Prince of Bhutan, addressed issues related to the welfare of millions of children around the globe in his first speech to the United Nations on May 8th in New York.



*HRH The Crown Prince of Bhutan speaking at the United Nations, New York*

In his address to the UN General Assembly during its landmark meeting devoted to children, The Crown Prince stated: 'While we have made significant progress in placing the issue of child welfare on the national and international agenda, there is no room for complacency. The lives of millions of children today continue to be stunted by disease, illiteracy and exploitation, their innocence shattered by terrorism and war'.

Speaking about Bhutan, His Royal Highness said, 'I am pleased to submit that we have achieved most of the goals set during the World Summit in 1990. Guided by His Majesty the King's development philosophy of Gross National Happiness, which stresses holistic development, we have accorded the highest priority to the welfare of children. Over the past two decades, investments in basic social services have exceeded 26% of the annual budget. A comprehensive primary health care system covers over 90% of the population; life expectancy has increased by 20 years to 66; infant mortality rates have been cut by 40%; and 80% of our children are in schools'.

The Crown Prince concluded by speaking of the poverty, disease, hunger and pain in societies today. 'It is our duty to build a future which ensures that every child will be free of these afflictions. To achieve this, we must all work together in a spirit of commitment, trust and mutual respect while taking great care to plan, not just a few years ahead, but generations into the future'.

Throughout the Assembly, world leaders were urged to heed the voices of young people in creating 'A World Fit for Children'. The three-day session aimed to bring together leaders, NGOs, children's advocates and children themselves to explore long-standing obstacles to young people's well-being and development, as well as new challenges to the promotion and protection of their rights.

## An alternative Cup Final

**Bhutan wins 4 : 0!**

*Bhutan Football Federation & Kuensel*

**O**n Sunday June 30th, just hours before the climax of the FIFA World Cup 2002 final in Japan, 'the Other Final' between Bhutan and Montserrat was held in Thimphu's Changlimithang Stadium.

The FIFA authorised match, which Bhutan won 4 : 0 was overwhelmingly festive as thousands of students, business people and government officials got caught up in the 'spirit of football'.

Bhutan captain, Wangyel Dorji scored just five minutes after kick-off, and again 20 minutes into the second half. Dinesh Chetteri, Bhutan's veteran striker, scored the third goal ten minutes later. Three goals down and with time running out the Montserrat team was visibly tired as the Wangyel scored a fourth goal in the final minutes.

Speaking about their victory Wangyel said, 'It feels great. After the first goal our confidence grew... Montserrat played well but the altitude seemed to be their weakness'.

Montserrat captain, Charles Thompson, said: 'It was a good game... very competitive. We played really hard and we accept defeat. The altitude was a big factor for us. We'd like the chance for Druk XI to come to Montserrat and play there'.

Following the match the two teams sat together to watch the World Cup final between Brazil and Germany.

Bhutan became FIFA's 202nd member on 5th August 2000. Bhutan is placed 202nd and Montserrat 203rd in the FIFA world ranking.

Kessels Kramer, a Dutch communications firm, is planning a documentary film and book depicting the very different cultures of the two teams involved, and also showing how football can prove to be a global language that unites very different people.

'The idea was born out of passion and enthusiasm for Bhutan, Montserrat and football', said Matthijs de Jongh of KesselsKramer. 'The match was a meeting of two beautiful and respectful cultures. It is not about who wins or loses, but about the celebration of two countries which, despite obstacles, share a love for the game.'



*Bhutan captain Wangyel Dorji and Montserrat captain Charles Thompson shake hands in front of English FA referee Steve Bennet*



# More news from the

## A Medical Elective in Bhutan

by Thomas Connor, Richard Corbett & Adam Stearns

As three final year Oxford University medical students we were fortunate to spend a ten-week placement in Bhutan as a chance to compare UK health care with that in a different country. Our attachment gave us opportunities both to observe and participate in a complete cross section of the Bhutanese health system.

We spent the first four weeks at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) in Thimphu, rotating through a number of different departments. We then moved to the District Hospital in Paro for three weeks, before completing our time at a Basic Health Unit in Bajo. This variety allowed us to see a unit at each level of health care.

While in Thimphu, we were fortunate to be able to spend some time at the Institute of Traditional Medicine. In Bhutan the interaction between traditional and Western medicine services is very different from in the UK. The importance of the indigenous units is much more widely accepted, with district hospitals usually sheltering both services in close proximity. It was interesting to see cross-referral between the two services with, for example, some chronic pain conditions being referred to indigenous practitioners while acutely ill patients were redirected to the local hospital.

The enormous developments that have occurred over the last 20 years were apparent and it was even more encouraging to see the huge expansion of training programs that is envisaged under the auspices of the Ninth Five Year Plan. It is remarkable to consider that all healthcare is completely state-financed, and impressive to see the operation of entities such as the Essential Drugs Program overcoming enormous logistical problems associated with the low population density to ensure that even the smallest clinic has a seemingly uninterrupted supply of basic drugs and equipment.

As in the UK, there is growing concern over how such a system can continue to be financed into the future. However, programs like the National Trust Fund for the provision of free vaccination offer the chance of truly sustainable development. In this context we were fortunate to meet the Director of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Gado Tshering, to discuss his vision of the future.

While travelling through the country, we saw something of its beautiful landscape and were able to place in context the difficulties in providing health care to a largely agricultural population, and the logistical difficulties posed by the mountainous terrain. As students we benefited from enthusiastic teaching and we were made very welcome throughout. We were fortunate to be assisted with translation by a variety of staff.

Above all, we were struck by the enthusiasm of the health staff. From the most junior nursing student to the Director of the Ministry of Health we saw a positivity and enthusiasm that is often sadly lacking in the British National Health Service.

## Toothache in Thimphu

by Michael Rutland

I vividly remember catching a glimpse of the dental facilities available in Bhutan in 1970. The sight of the young man frantically pedalling on a sort of bicycle contraption to turn the primitive dental drill in a not-too-well maintained room made me vow never to have a toothache in Thimphu. So when a couple of months ago I developed a rather bad toothache (totally unconnected with my overturning my Hilux in the previous week) my first reaction was to find the next available seat on the Drukair plane to Bangkok! However, reassured by Bhutanese friends that things had improved since the '70s I courageously (as I thought) went to the Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) to see a dentist.

What a surprise! I was shown into an excellently equipped, scrupulously clean and pleasantly decorated surgery to meet one of the Bhutanese dental surgeons. Immensely competent, he inspired that immediate confidence that you need when you are sitting back in the chair with your mouth wide open. An inspection, a diagnosis, and recommended solution were given, and so I found myself in Thimphu having root canal treatment, carried out with expertise and efficiency – so much so that during one of the four treatment sessions I fell asleep in the dental chair. I could not have had more competent treatment if I had paid hundreds of pounds in Guildford!

I tell this story to highlight the impressive developments that have occurred in the last few years in Thimphu's hospital facilities, and indeed across the Kingdom. Tremendous credit must be given to the Minister of Health and Education and his staff for the way in which all-round improvements in hospital facilities, resources and management made my visit to the JDWNRH Dental Surgery no longer something to fear!

Development has not been restricted to Thimphu or to dental facilities. Across the country there has been a concerted effort to bring at least primary health care to all the population, with consequent benefit to the general health of the Bhutanese. Health care in Bhutan is free, but costs are rising. Better diagnosis leads to the need for more and better medicines and treatment. So from personal experience I can strongly recommend to all Members the value of the Health Trust Fund, which aims to secure the ability to provide medicines in the future.

A leaflet about a sponsored walk in aid of the Health Trust Fund is included in this issue of the Newsletter. Do make a contribution if you can. I promise it won't all go on my toothache!

### Keep up-to-date with news from Bhutan

Visit the website of Bhutan's national newspaper, *Kuensel*, at [www.kuenselonline.com](http://www.kuenselonline.com) for regular news updates, editorials, readers' comments and more ...

# Kingdom of Bhutan



## Medical referral costs shoot up

by Palden Tshering, Kuensel Online

The royal government is 'seriously considering' cost sharing possibilities to offset the ever rising cost of referring patients to hospitals outside the country, according to a spokesman for the Department of Health.

Last year, the cost of referrals reached a record Nu 49 million (£670,000) exceeding the allocated budget by about Nu 9 million (£120,000). Of the total of 593 patients referred abroad during 2001, 256 were sent to Vellore, 258 to Kolkata, 71 to Guwhati and eight to New Delhi.

Records at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH) show that referral costs have increased steadily over the last few years. By January 2002, half way into the current financial year, 399 patients had been sent abroad. 'At this rate, to sustain the referral programme, patients being referred may one day have to pay for their travel with the government taking care of the medical expenses', the health spokesman said.

The acting superintendent of the JDWNR Hospital, Dr. Ugen Dophu, explained that JDWNRH had the facilities to provide most basic specialised care services, but those cases which cannot be treated are referred abroad on the decision of a referral committee. The committee consists of the most senior doctors from JDWNRH representing each field of specialty. Terminal cases that have no more than palliative care such as advanced and disseminated cancers, terminal failures of major organs, irreversible brain damage, multiple valvular disease in aged patients and cosmetic surgeries which are of no functional benefit are ineligible for referrals.

Cancer patients constituted the highest number of cases referred to hospitals abroad in the last three years. Last year alone 143 cancer patients were referred abroad, accounting for 25% of the total number of referral cases and costing the national exchequer Nu 8.146 million (£110,000). Cardiac surgery, with 78 cases, constituted the second highest number of cases referred abroad.

Dr. Ugen Dophu said that stomach cancer in men and cervical cancer in women were the most common cases. Over the last three years cancer in men represented 29% and in women 12% of cases treated in the JDWNRH.

'The high rate of cancer may have something to do with the Bhutanese diet and life style', he said, 'or it could be that more people are actually coming to the hospital and the disease is being diagnosed'. The senior surgical specialist at the hospital, Dr. Sonam Dukpa, said that diet was an important factor, although the exact cause of stomach cancer was unknown. 'When the stomach is subjected to irritants like doma (betel nut), chilli, spices or uncooked dried meat, it causes trauma to the stomach creating ulcers', he said, adding that stomach cancer, if operated on in time, can be cured.

The three main centres in India where Bhutanese patients are referred to are Vellore for cardiac and cancer cases, Kolkata for cervical cancer cases and Guwhati for patients with head injuries.

## Bhutan embraces 'people participation'

by K.E.S. Kirby, Kuensel Online

When the 150 members of the National Assembly strode into the Assembly chamber in June, their vigorous debates, including a highly anticipated one on strengthening dzongkhag- and geog-level governance institutions, represented a new level of people's participation in Bhutan.

But the National Assembly is only the beginning: the launching of the Ninth Five Year Plan will bring the sharpest focus ever to 'bottom-up' involvement, taking overall responsibility for local development planning and implementation to the geog level for the first time. It's a significant step forward from the time when many Bhutanese saw development as 'one-way traffic' driven by ministries. As one official put it, local people 'tended to just sit there waiting for something to fall into their laps'.

Those days are gone. Across the country the evolution of people's participation is such that ordinary Bhutanese are poised to help determine both the content and direction of the national development agenda.

Although people's participation has existed in the past, this 'new era represents the determination of His Majesty the King to further empower the grassroots level in terms of decision-making', said Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, Minister for Foreign Affairs.

In ten pilot areas financial decentralization has provided budgets directly to geogs. Karma Hamu of the Ministry of Home Affairs explains, 'This provides a budget up front around which geog members can plan. There is more accountability - people are asking the gup, 'Hey, what have you done with our money?''

Participants in environmental management and education projects are similarly empowered, agreed Tandri Dorji of the National Environment Commission. 'People are now more open with their criticisms,' he said, adding that rural beneficiaries are 'very good at connecting their needs to the environment.' By developing geog-level micro-environmental action plans 'geogs are beginning to take control of issues close to their hearts'.

Another initiative with a strong focus on people's participation is the small grants programme, which provides money to local organizations to address environmental concerns. Already, 13 dzongkhags have implemented projects with grants of up to US\$50,000.

Some, however, are apprehensive about receiving more responsibility. 'This is how people felt even when we first spoke of decentralization to the district level', Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley recalled. 'But His Majesty went ahead, and ten years later, we can with confidence decentralize further. So I'm sure that what has happened before will also happen at the geog level'.

'The fact is', he added, 'His Majesty the King and the government have faith in the collective wisdom of the people and their capacity. And as modest as the people may be, we believe that the kind of responsibilities that we envision for them are well-placed on their shoulders'.



## Laptop Computer Donated

Following the recent visit to Bhutan of Tom Macan, Deputy High Commissioner to India, and Eric Taylor, 3rd Secretary at the High Commission, a new laptop computer has been donated by the British High Commission, New Delhi, to the Forest Management Project currently in progress in the Ministry of Agriculture.

During their visit Mr Macan and Mr Taylor met the Foreign Secretary, Dasho Ugyen Tshering, and other senior Government officials. Michael Rutland hosted an informal lunch on behalf of the Bhutan Society for the visitors, attended by Chief Justice Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye.

Tom Macan, who has paid two official visits to Bhutan, leaves New Delhi shortly to take up the post of Governor of the British Virgin Isles. (Bhutan Society member Toby Jessel recounts the famous reply of Winston Churchill when he was asked where the British Virgin Isles were... 'I've no idea, but I've no doubt they're a long way away from the Isle of Man'.)

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## BBC Correspondent visits Bhutan

Alistair Lawson, the BBC's Bangladesh Correspondent, recently visited Bhutan at the invitation of the Foreign Minister.

He had an interview with the Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley, and commented on the frank and straightforward manner in which the Minister dealt with a wide range of questions, including questions of the verification process going on in the UNHCR camps in Nepal.

Apart from meetings with Government officials and others, including the Editor in Chief of Kuensel, Alistair Lawson saw the modern side of Thimphu through a late-night visit to one of Thimphu's new 'night clubs'.

The focus of this visit was the anniversary of The King's Coronation, and several pieces were broadcast on BBC World Service which emphasised The King's pivotal and leading role in initiating the writing of the new Constitution of Bhutan and in the development of democratic institutions.

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## Bhutan's National Anthem online

Anyone with Internet access who is curious to hear Bhutan's national anthem can log on to Bhutan's Ministry of Trade and Industry website at:

[www.mti.gov.bt/bhutan-anthem.mid](http://www.mti.gov.bt/bhutan-anthem.mid)

to hear a rousing electronic version.

## Bhutan Greetings Card

A surprise find in the John Lewis Department Store stationery department was this attractive (and very colourful) greetings card from the French card, poster and calendar company Nouvelles Images ([www.nouvellesimages.com](http://www.nouvellesimages.com)).

The card is called 'Himalaya', although Members will recognise that the photo was clearly taken in Bhutan. It is available in John Lewis, Oxford Street, and bookshops, museums and card and gift shops across the UK.



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## Bhutan's National Assembly

### The 80th Session commences

The formal opening of the 80th Session of the National Assembly took place on Tuesday, June 25th. On a brilliant sunny morning the entrance court of Thimphu's National Assembly building, with Tashichodzong across the river, made a splendid setting for the procession of musicians, dancers, monks, Ministers and other senior officials who preceded HM The King on his arrival to open the Session. Earlier, HRH The Crown Prince, who had arrived back from Oxford on the previous day, was awarded the Red Scarf.

The opening of the Assembly was preceded by the traditional Marchang Ceremony. The Speaker of the National Assembly then presented a Report, followed by a review of the progress made by the government over the past year given by Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, Chairman of the Council of Ministers.