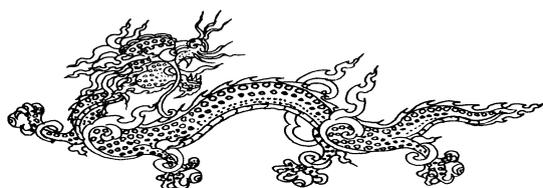


# THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



## NEWSLETTER

Number 30

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT GCMG FRSE

October 2004

As previously advertised:

Saturday 6th November, 2004

### **The Bhutan Society goes West ...to Bristol!**

Join us for an informal get together and a rare chance to see the unbelievable film "Unicycling in Bhutan" (no, this is not a misprint or a joke!).

*Kiras* and *ghos* optional, bring your favourite photos, books etc. for that extra Bhutan fix. Tea and coffee will be provided. Bring your own beer, wine etc. and a folding chair if you have one.

**Saturday 6th November, 2004**

**Meet from 6pm for 7pm start**

**3 All Saints Road, Clifton, Bristol BS8 2JG**

Please contact Catherine in advance so we have some idea of numbers to expect:

Catherine Eva

Tel.: 0795 153 1931

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Members of Bhutan's Royal Academy of Performing Arts perform traditional folk songs & dances at the National Liberal Club, London

### **Folk Dances & Songs event update**

The Folk Songs and Dances of Bhutan, performed for the Society on 1st September by members of Bhutan's Royal Academy of Performing Arts, was a very enjoyable evening. Event organiser Freda Ferne fills us in on what happened next...

"As the group were performing in Bath I invited them, and group leader Colonel Kado, to stay in my little village (27 houses) nearby. Friends generously helped with the accommodation and everyone quickly felt very much at home and relaxed. Our visitors were delighted when we asked them to cook *ema datse* for us. Together with a mountain of rice – including Bhutan red rice (available at Sainsburys) – and other dishes, visitors and hosts enjoyed a superb meal before walking through riverside meadows to a pub for an evening of live Irish folk music. The Bhutanese took their instruments along and joined the local musicians at their table. What followed was little short of magical. They compared instruments – Norbu had made his three & Dan had made his guitar – tried them out and joined in with each other. It was amazing watching music at work as an international language. The Bhutanese quickly got everyone joining in with one song which had a chorus in English. People were thrilled by this impromptu performance and were still talking about it when I went the following Sunday.

On Monday morning the group visited a local primary school where I am helping the children learn about Bhutan. The morning included singing and dancing, information about the instruments and Bhutan's national flag. The children also sang some songs for their visitors. One of their teachers was dressed in a *kira* and Colonel Kado showed them how he needs help to put on his *gho*. The visit proved to be a great success and a very exciting start to the new school term for staff and children alike. I know that some of the children have e-mailed Colonel Kado and already received replies. Now they are writing to children at a primary school in Trongsa. Very special friendships & memories have been made."

This Newsletter is produced by Lucy & Bodo Hornberger to whom enquiries and contributions should be addressed. Unit 23, 78 Marylebone High Street, London W1U 5AP E-mail: [info@bhutansociety.org](mailto:info@bhutansociety.org) Fax: (020) 7580 2648

The Society's website is at [www.bhutansociety.org](http://www.bhutansociety.org) and carries information about the Society, news and events, an archive of previous Newsletters and a selection of interesting Bhutan-related links.



# News & Updates from

## **Bhutan Society Functions, Events and Activities: GUIDELINES**

1. The organisation of functions, events and activities of the Bhutan Society of the UK is the overall responsibility of the Honorary Secretary, who is assisted from time to time by other members of the Society including Peter Li (Annual Dinners) and Catherine Eva and Freda Ferne (Lectures and other events). The Honorary Secretary will maintain the Diary of Bhutan Society Events and Activities.
2. Proposed lectures and other events or activities, and any other use of the name of the Bhutan Society, must be agreed in advance by the Honorary Secretary of the Bhutan Society, who can always be contacted either by email, by phone or by letter or through the Editor of the Bhutan Society Newsletter.
3. Any member of the Bhutan Society of the UK is encouraged to organise appropriate functions and activities, particularly in their local area. It is hoped that this will encourage local events which will be more easily accessible to members who are some distance from London. However, please note paragraph 2. above.
4. Any financial commitment or expenditure which could represent a demand on the funds of the Bhutan Society in connection with any event, function or publicity (including personal expenses incurred in their organisation or realisation) must be approved in advance by the Honorary Secretary and Honorary Treasurer.
5. Members wishing to organise an event or function should provide an itemised estimate of the likely financial demand on the Bhutan Society. A budget will then be agreed for that event by the Honorary Treasurer in discussion with the Honorary Secretary. The organiser may then incur expenditure up to that budget amount without further reference to the Honorary Treasurer or Secretary. Any expenditure in excess of that agreed budget must, however, have the prior approval of the Honorary Treasurer.
6. All claims on the Bhutan Society for reimbursement of expenditure (including personal expenses) incurred in the organising and implementing of events, functions and publicity must be accompanied by appropriate invoices and receipts.

**Simon Bowes Lyon**  
Chairman

**Michael Rutland**  
Hon. Secretary

## **Royal Visit to London**

On July 11th and 12th Her Majesty Ashi Tshering Pem Wangchuck paid a short private visit to London with daughters TRH Ashi Kesang and Ashi Chimmi, and son HRH Dasho Ugyen. The visit was a stopover on their way back to Bhutan from Switzerland, where HM Ashi Tshering Pem had carried out a programme of official engagements in connection with her work as President of Bhutan's Youth Development Fund.



*HM Ashi Tshering Pem at the Tower of London having signed the Queen's House visitors' book*



*HM and her children at the House of Lords with Baroness Sharp and Baroness Thomas*



*HRH Dasho Ugyen at Horse Guards Parade*



## Michael Rutland appointed Bhutan's Hon. Consul to the UK

Michael Rutland (the Bhutan Society's Hon. Secretary) has been appointed by the Royal Government of Bhutan as the Kingdom's first Honorary Consul to the United Kingdom. This is of great significance as it is the first ever such appointment to the UK, and the sole official diplomatic representation of the Kingdom of Bhutan in the UK.

In spite of sporadic, and not always happy, contacts between Bhutan and the British in India in the 18th and 19th Centuries, it was not until the establishment of the Bhutanese Monarchy in 1907 that regular contact developed between Bhutan and the UK. Even so, there has been no diplomatic representation until now.

Michael Rutland's appointment was signed on the particularly auspicious First Day of the Fourth Month of the Wood Monkey Year (corresponding to 20th May 2004) by The King of Bhutan on the advice of Bhutan's Cabinet.

Michael Rutland first lived in Bhutan in 1970, and taught science and maths for two years at the Ugyen Wangchuck Academy. There he taught the then Crown Prince, now the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck. A schoolteacher by profession, Michael Rutland has also worked in the Armed Forces of the Sultan of Oman, for the UN, and for UNHCR. He retired from his post as Director of the Science Faculty at the George Abbot School in Guildford in 2000. Since then he has lived for the major part of each year in Bhutan, until his appointment as Honorary Consul in the UK.

*The Hon. Consul's website is under construction at:  
[www.bhutanconsul.co.uk](http://www.bhutanconsul.co.uk)*

Bhutan has also appointed Honorary Consuls in France (Dr. Françoise Pommaret), Spain (Mr. Ian Triay) and Denmark. According to Bhutan's Foreign Ministry, the appointment of Honorary Consuls will facilitate and promote Bhutan's interests and strengthen the friendly relations between Bhutan and these countries.

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland will be in Guildford until the end of October. He will then return to Bhutan and stay until the end of May 2005. He is delighted to meet Members visiting Bhutan during the periods when he is there. Please telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

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## The Harewood Stupa Project

Lama Sonam Chopel is 77 years old. He has lived and worked all his life in the Kingdom of Bhutan. He is a builder of Stupas, the white-washed religious monuments that are so characteristic of the Buddhist Himalayas: thirteen golden rings topped by a sun and crescent moon, sitting on top of a dome which in turn stands on a square, tiered base. In his lifetime, Lama Sonam has made more than 100 of them.

In the summer of 2004 he took up his most unusual commission yet: to build a Stupa in the gardens of Harewood House in Yorkshire, one of Britain's most beautiful country houses, visited by over 300,000 people each year. Lama Sonam spent a couple of months in Yorkshire, working alongside local builders and craftsmen. Neither he nor the small team who accompanied him had ever travelled beyond the Himalayas before, or flown in an aeroplane.

The Stupa was commissioned by David Lascelles, whose family have lived at Harewood for more than 250 years. David is a film producer by profession who has travelled widely in India and the Himalayas. "I have been intrigued for some time with the idea of having Himalayan architectural features among the rhododendrons and other Himalayan plants that grow round the Lake at Harewood, as they do in so many English country gardens," says David. "Visiting Bhutan recently and meeting Lama Sonam has made it possible to turn this dream into a reality."

*A Bhutan Society group recently visited Harewood as the guests of David Lascelles – a report and photos will follow in the next issue of the newsletter.*

## Recent visitors to Bhutan

Among recent visitors to Bhutan were Michael Palin (filming his current 'Himalaya' TV travelogue) and well-know comedienne Ruby Wax. Ruby and her actress friend Suzanne Bertish visited Michael Rutland in Begana and enthusiastically joined in with the preparations for a local festival – including cooking huge quantities of rice! An article by Ruby about her visit to Bhutan was recently published in the travel section of the Daily Mail.



*Ruby Wax (to left of photo) stirs things up at Michael Rutland's house in Begana, near Thimphu*



## To coin or not to coin...

By Gopilal Acharya, Kuensel

**L**ogrig stands for computer, *gyangthong* for TV, *yongdrel* for internet and *numkhor* for vehicle. These are among the hundreds of new Dzongkha terms coined by the Dzongkha Expert Committee (DEC) for commonly used English words. But only a handful know of these Dzongkha words and an even smaller number actually use them. Indeed, many people are asking whether it is worth coining Dzongkha terms for common English words.

The DEC, however, is convinced that it is a must for the development and survival of Dzongkha in the future. "If we take every new idea and term in its original English form, Dzongkha in a decade will be overloaded with foreign words. And one day Dzongkha may fail to qualify and justify itself to be Bhutanese," says Lungtaen Gyatso, the chairman of the DEC.

More importantly, coining Dzongkha words gives people an option, say experts. "Our generation has seen English terms first and Dzongkha terms at the later stage. But when we have all these terms coined in Dzongkha our younger generation will have two options at the same time. They will have 'TV' as well as *gyangthong*. If these two words are given equal importance both the words will reflect the meaning. So it will be a matter of choice. At the moment it is not a matter of choice, but rather a matter of what we are used to."

The committee agrees that the usage of the new Dzongkha words is limited in comparison to the English words that already have widespread usage and acceptance.

But they are optimistic that in another ten to fifteen years the new Dzongkha words will have diffused into mainstream written and spoken Dzongkha. Lungtaen Gyatso says that it might also depend on how rapidly Dzongkha becomes popular and user friendly. "The present school system does not allow much Dzongkha studies. People are in more contact with English. The pace could be hastened with more school hours in Dzongkha."

The experts admit that although Dzongkha as a language in the context of Bhutanese culture and religion is very rich, it fails when it confronts a different culture and technology. "Our language is not adequate there," says Choki Dhendup, a member of the expert committee. "I also strongly feel that words which did not originate in Bhutan could be left as such."

Coining a particular word is not easy. Especially since Dzongkha has compound word structure. In Dzongkha two or three independent words put together become a single word. For example, the word 'hope' in English is a single word with complete meaning in itself. But *rewa*, the Dzongkha equivalent of hope, is composed of two

independent words 're' and 'wa' put together. Thus, Dzongkha's segmented pattern makes the job of coining words difficult. "We have to look into the consistency of the word too, because the words were not coined earlier," said a member of the DEC.

When the committee coins a word, it looks at different aspects of the word. One is the etymology of the term in English. For example, why is tree called a tree and not a dog, or vice versa? What does this particular word mean? What sense does it give? Is it acceptable to Bhutan? "If it isn't, we go into the meaning translation rather than the literal translation," says Lungtaen Gyatso. "Also after we coin, we see how it appeals to our people. We also try to simplify it to the greatest extent possible while, at the same time, giving full meaning of it."

The committee also tries to look at other regional languages, especially the Tibeto-Burman languages where there could exist similar words pointing towards the meaning. The other trick is to employ certain words spoken in the villages which have not been adopted in written Dzongkha. But the biggest challenge to the committee is the new technological English terms, like 'computer' and 'Microsoft'. For example, computer in English means 'a machine that computes'. But that could not be translated literally like TV, so the committee thought differently. "Given that certain formulae are programmed into it, it works like an intelligent being. At the same time it operates by electricity," says the chairman. "So we decided to call it *logrig* literally meaning 'an intelligent machine run by means of electricity'."

There are others, however, who feel that the DEC should leave the names of inventions as they are. "There is no need for the experts to coin a word for computer or football or television," says a senior translator, R. Wangchuk. "Every Bhutanese understands 'computer' better than 'logrig'. Our so-called experts should understand that certain things are best accepted as they are, while others are irrelevant to our context."

Others complain that when the experts themselves fail to make use of the words they coin, they should not expect common people to use them. Some complain that Dzongkha is already a difficult language and that creating new terminologies is making it worse. The committee, however, leaves international units (kilogram, kilometre etc.) as they are. It also does not coin an equivalent for words named after people, such as Celsius and Fahrenheit.

While most older Bhutanese share the concern that Dzongkha faces an imminent threat of being neglected by the younger generation, and that one's language is a critical part of one's identity, the youngsters, it seems, will continue calling their *apa* 'dad' and *ama* 'mum'.

# Kingdom of Bhutan



## Trust Fund donates school equipment

The Bhutan Society Trust Fund has donated an overhead projector and two whiteboards to the Changankha Lower Secondary School, Thimphu. The equipment will be used by the school's Special Educational Needs Department.



*The Headmistress and a teacher with the new overhead projector*

## Bhutan promotes mountain biking

*By Karma Choden, Kuensel*

The Department of Tourism is planning to promote mountain biking in an attempt to attract adventure-seeking tourists to Bhutan. Currently about 60 mountain bikers visit Bhutan each year.

With assistance from Austrian tourism consultants the Department will carry out a survey of the 18 existing cycle routes in Paro, Thimphu and Punakha dzongkhags, the three areas considered to have the highest potential for mountain biking. "Not every trekking route is suitable for mountain biking," cautioned tourism consultant Martin Zeppezauer. "It is important to canalise proper trails and routes to promote a good product." Farmhouse stays and health tourism are also areas for Bhutan to explore, he said.

Rinzin Ongdra of the Bhutan Mountain Biking Club welcomed the survey. The club is organising an event in October that will take mountain bikers from Bumthang across two passes of 3,400 metres to Punakha, ending with an uphill race of 38.3 km. "The idea is to create awareness about adventure tourism and mountain biking among tour operators both within and outside Bhutan" he said.

## Credit card makes online shopping possible for Bhutanese

*Kuensel Online*

With the country's first international credit card, the Gold Visa International, to be launched by the Bhutan National Bank in October, prospective card holders are all abuzz about Internet shopping, which has so far not been possible for most Bhutanese. Baby clothes, books, hi-tech gadgets, computer deals, airline tickets – there are many possibilities for a better deal.

But shopping online comes with dangers, cautions Deputy Managing Director of the Bhutan National Bank, Karma. "Shopping online carries a risk of fraud, therefore people should look for goods and services that are well established". The online purchase of prohibited items, such as arms, pornographic materials and drugs, is illegal. "If such items are purchased using the credit card, then the card holder will be debarred from holding the card and may be liable to prosecution", Karma warns.

Meanwhile, Bhutan's travel agents do not feel that the introduction of the Visa card will affect their business, despite airline tickets bought online being much cheaper than those bought through traditional travel agents. Thimphu-based agents Tsenden Travels and Atlas Travels claimed that their businesses would not be affected as the bulk of their bookings come from the government.

## Druk Air's new Airbus to arrive soon

*By Kencho Wangdi, Kuensel*

The first of Druk Air's two new Airbus 319s will land in Paro on October 19 – an auspicious day in the Buddhist calendar, picked to ensure that the aircraft arrives safely from Hamburg, Germany. Final technical inspection and other ground checks will take place in Germany and the transfer ceremony will take place there on October 14.

Costing about US \$39 million, the A319 has almost double the payload of Druk Air's current BAe 146s, and can travel faster and further. The A319 can seat 124 passengers in a two class cabin layout, while the BAe 146 seats only 80 people. With a range of 6,800 kms, the twin engine A319 can fly from Paro to Hong Kong non-stop at 840 km an hour. The second A319 is expected to reach Bhutan by the second week of December.

Meanwhile the construction of hangars for the new planes remains a 'critical' priority for Druk Air, officials said. Although there is sufficient budget provision, the construction is still pending and there are concerns about possible wind damage to the planes if kept in the open. The required extension of the runway has also not started. The airport's old tower, however, has been demolished to allow the planes to park near the terminal.



# News from the

## Are *tshechus* losing their significance?

By Kinley Wangmo, Kuensel

The lack of interest among the youth was a cause of concern for many elders attending the recent Wangdue-Phodrang and Thimphu *tshechus* (religious festivals). “The youth prefer to be at the fair rather than watch the *tshechu*”, said 75 year-old Phurba. “I do not understand why.”

The Wangdue-Phodrang fair had been put up by locals and people from other dzongkhags. It included food, gambling stalls and video screenings of local movies – always a big draw. Bjena gup Dechen said that elders attended the *tshechu* leaving important work at home unattended. “They understand the meaning and importance of the *tshechu*,” he said. “Obstacles and ill fortune will be removed in this life if we attend the *tshechu*,” he continued. The fair, although organised for the people, was a big distraction to the *tshechu*, he added. “The youth go out of the house saying they want to attend the *tshechu* but they end up spending their time at the fair.”

A teacher, Kinley, said that the youth should be made aware of the significance of the *tshechu*. “Schools should have books about *tshechus*, and the media should also play a part by giving information about the *tshechu* before it starts.” He added that going by present trends, the Bhutanese youth could get themselves disconnected from their own culture and tradition and later even fail to identify themselves as Bhutanese. “Their ignorance about the *tshechu* is a sign of eroding cultural values,” he said.

At Tashichho-dzong, Thimphu, the mask dances drew the biggest crowd as the masks are said to be treasures retrieved by a *terton* (finder of religious treasures). Amid the riot of colours of brocade *tegos*, intricate hand woven *kiras* and multicoloured *ghos*, Angay (grandma) Namgay Dem, 66, sits with her four grandchildren. “They tag along with me wherever I go,” she says. She lives in Punakha and has come all the way to Thimphu to watch the *tshechu*. “I tell my grandchildren the importance and significance of the *tshechu* just like my grandparents taught and explained it to me when I was a child,” she says.

Urbanisation and a changing lifestyle has had an impact on the *tshechus*. “The costumes that the masked dancers wear are more sophisticated and rich, and traditional dances are more light and lively,” comments Angay Namgay Dem. “There are also more people attending the *tshechu* now and they all seem better dressed,” she adds. “But I am not sure about their faith and understanding of what is happening.”

A look around the courtyard shows mostly elderly people and young children (plus some tourists). Most people are from a rural background. The more educated and urbanised Thimphu crowd is conspicuously absent – it seems that for the sophisticated Thimphu resident the

*tshechu* means holidays to do other things, like going out of town, going on picnics and to parties and polishing up on one’s golf skills. Attending the *tshechu* is not really on the agenda, except maybe on the last day to get blessings and even then only for the shortest time possible. “I attend the *tshechu* as it is a great photo opportunity,” says an architect, but agrees that urbanised Thimphu residents hardly ever attend. “I have never met any of my friends at the *tshechu* in the last four to five years,” he comments.

Some blame the absence of the more urbanised members of society on the fact that the dances can be perceived as long and tedious to watch. But others point out that the Tashichho-dzong courtyard is too small to accommodate everyone interested in attending the *tshechu*. If you arrive late, chances are that you will not get to see the dances because of the crowds.



For some young people, however, the *tshechu* is a time “for gaining merit and at the same time an opportunity to be with family and friends and meet new people,” said Pema, a junior high school student who had come along with his friends. “It is education on the good and the bad.”

During the break around midday, families sit in groups and relish the food brought from home. “When we die, we meet the characters that we see during the *tshechu* and if we do not recognise them we will see them in a state of anger and fury,” says a girl studying in the seventh standard. “My mother told me this and since then the *tshechus* have meant something different to me.” Sonam Jamtsho, a 27 year-old working in a private firm, can’t help laughing during the performance of the one of the more ribald dances. “Some of the movements are quite base, but it teaches people about the good and bad that exists in a society,” he explains.

The youth are uncertain about the whole concept of gaining merit from attending the *tshechu* while the elders are devoted and sure of it. Many youngsters just tag along, excited to be in the crowd. “Maybe it has something to do with age,” said Phuntsho, a corporate employee who has not attended a *tshechu* for some years now. “As we get older then maybe we start getting devoted and think it is important to attend.”

# Kingdom of Bhutan



## Obituary: Gordon Temple

Gordon Temple died on 17th September in the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital in Thimphu. Gordon was 77 years old and had lived in Bhutan for the last 18 years. He was a close relative of the late Archbishop William Temple, sometime Archbishop of Canterbury.

Gordon first lived in Paro in the mid-sixties when he was Secretary to HM the Queen (now Queen Mother) Ashi Kesang Wangchuck. He had earlier worked in tea estate management in West Bengal, where he produced some exceedingly fine teas.

In the late sixties Gordon moved from Bhutan to Nepal, and for many years was the representative of Save the Children Fund in Kathmandu. In the early eighties Gordon moved back to Bhutan, again working with the small Save the Children project in South East Bhutan. Later he worked on solar electrification projects in rural areas of Bhutan. He also introduced a beehive which allowed villagers to produce honey without killing the bees.

He was never averse, and usually most keen, to walk for many days to carry out work in the remotest areas. As a result he possessed an outstanding knowledge of the Kingdom. It was always a delight to listen to his anecdotes, gossip and stories, enlivened by his often dry and invariably witty but gentle sense of fun. An unassuming character, with a most generous spirit, he made many close friends at every level of Bhutanese society and was held in great affection by all.

The Chief Justice, Lyonpo Sonam Tobgay visited Gordon in hospital on the morning of his death. His links with and his love for Bhutan were immensely strong and some months ago Gordon was made a citizen of Bhutan, which will have been a source of much pleasure for him. Exactly as he would have wished, Gordon was cremated in Bhutan, at Hongsho, just below Dochula, on Sunday 26th September. Gordon's sister, Ming, travelled from London to Bhutan for the cremation and The Bhutan Society was represented by my son, Kesang Wangchuk.

*By Michael Rutland*

## Bhutanese Chefs upgrade skills

Chefs from Bhutan's hotels are attending a month-long training course on how to prepare Continental and Thai cuisines. The course will promote and upgrade the skills of Bhutanese chefs and is conducted by an instructor from the Tourism Authority of Thailand. The participants will be taught a wide range of culinary techniques, from preparation to presentation. 35 chefs from hotels and resorts across the kingdom are attending the course.

## New stage in Bhutan-UK relations

*By Kinley Dorji, Kuensel*

Bhutan's relationship with the United Kingdom has reached an important stage and is likely to expand in several areas, according to the British Deputy High Commissioner in India, Mr. Mark Runacres, who recently led the annual British delegation to Bhutan.

Seven officials from New Delhi and London, covering politics, the economy, defence, and the media, met with representatives of the Bhutanese government and informally with HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck. "This is a substantial delegation, and I think we have benefited very significantly from the interaction we have been able to have," Mr Runacres told Kuensel.

Co-operation between Bhutan and the UK is currently limited at the government level, however there are exchanges between the two countries. For example, the Royal Botanical Gardens are in touch with institutions in the UK and training has been conducted in the media and other sectors. Bhutan's role in the international arena is of interest to Britain, Mr. Runacres said, particularly Bhutan's membership of the UN Commission on Human Rights. "We have been struck by how seriously Bhutan takes its membership, how it has clearly taken a position in the Commission, and demonstrated a very high sense of responsibility. We are great believers that even a small country like Bhutan has a vital role to play in the international scene," he said.

The British government follows developments in Bhutan with interest, he continued. "As Bhutan develops, there are going to be significant changes. As the country evolves economically we can see our economic and commercial relationship developing. There are also political changes that are taking place in Bhutan with the constitution at a critical stage of development. Given Britain's long experience as a democracy with many institutions which Bhutan is now developing we envisage a dialogue on political developments growing over time."

The UK has closely observed what transpired in Bhutan's campaign against the militants as well as the question of the refugees in the camps in Nepal, said Mr. Runacres, adding that it had been "extremely useful to get the government of Bhutan's perspective on the refugee problem" during the visit. "We feel that our relationship is now gaining pace," he said. "There is a growing interest in the UK in Bhutan and from Bhutan's side there are some genuine efforts to add more substance to the relationship." The Bhutanese foreign minister, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, said that the visit by the British delegation had provided an opportunity for discussions on social, economic, political, and other developments. He added that he also had a very useful exchange of views with Mr. Runacres on regional and international issues.



# Bhutan Connections



## Motorcycle Adventures in Bhutan

By Max Horsley

**I**n October 2002 I was fortunate enough to be invited to Bhutan and I accepted without hesitation. I intended to rent myself a motorcycle in the capital, Thimphu, and set off to explore the Kingdom on a two week road trip.

Finding a bike in Bhutan was harder than I had expected. It took me a good two weeks of serious drinking and snooker hustling in the capital's night spots to find a drunken youth willing to part with his prized Yamaha YBX125. For an extortionately steep fee he threw in his rather dilapidated old helmet and a verbal guarantee that it would not break down. Reassured but unconvinced I took delivery of a commuter bike far more at home on the streets of New Delhi than the Bhutanese highways.



As I am sure you are aware, Bhutanese highways are definitely 'high' but to call them a 'way' is a touch optimistic. Their width and state allow for no margin of error. Sporadically the tarmac turns into spine-rupturing dusty tracks littered with mini boulders. The straightest stretch of road I chanced upon was 200 metres, resulting in a 200 kilometre journey taking anything up to eight hours. The flow of oncoming traffic is not heavy but one must be careful of cows and their rather nervous calves (in one day alone three calves nearly took me out), aggressive troops of monkeys and stoned pigs wandering the roads haphazardly (the Bhutanese feed the pigs copious amounts of cannabis leaves to make them lazy and more hungry!!). But the most dangerous aspect of riding a motorcycle through Bhutan in my opinion is you, the rider. Each bend you round, each valley you enter and each summit you pass, the view is so breathtaking and consuming that you forget the task at hand, namely, riding the bike. On too many occasions, mesmerised by the scenery, I came close to shooting straight off the road and into a raging river on the valley floor.

My first night on the road was spent in the small town of Khuntang near the spectacular Punakha Dzong, comparable in beauty, I believe, to the Potala Palace in Lhasa. I then bumped my way into the Phobjika valley to the village of Gangte where I was fortunate enough to see the elusive black neck cranes before they headed off to Tibet for the winter months. A long day's riding took me to Bumthang

with its gentle moor-like valleys and its trout-filled rivers. At the charming Kaila guest house I wined and dined with local dignitaries who were enjoying a post HIV workshop feast. The following morning I set off early along one of the most beautiful roads I have ever seen towards the town of Mongar. Descending into eastern Bhutan was like entering a new country. The architecture changed, but most noticeable was the change in vegetation – it was lush, tropical and jungle-like. Following three days of resting my painful bottom, I left my snooker playing buddies in Mongar and headed to the town of Trongsa where, to celebrate the King's birthday, the local children performed traditional dances and games to a delighted audience on the school playing-field. The following morning, taking a wrong turn, I found myself in Sembang, but on inspecting my map I realised that I could continue on to Gelephue and round to Wangdue-Phodrang which would lead me back to Thimphu.

Shortly after, I rounded a sharp bend at the same time as a steel-tipped arrow came whistling past my ear. Unwittingly, I had ridden into the middle of an archery competition taking place across the road. Two teams of eleven, representing two villages, have two shots at a wooden target situated roughly 150 metres away. The archers shoot their arrows over playing children, farmers herding their yaks and unsuspecting tourists on motorcycles. Having shot their arrows, the competitors then dash over to the target to watch and appreciate the other competitors' efforts. Standing around in the firing line, they leap around like men standing on hot coals, dodging the incoming missiles, shouting and screaming like children. Should a arrow strike the target, then the rest of the competitors turn their backs and jig around for 30 seconds before turning to face the victorious archer and salute him in an appropriate style. All is presided over by an enthusiastic crowd and smiling 'health and safety officer'. I was then treated as the guest of honour to a delicious, boozy lunch atop a hill next to a temple.

Gelephue is a dusty border town, more Indian than Bhutanese. I received an unusual amount of stares and it soon became apparent that I had wandered into an area off limits to foreigners (due to Assamese rebels in the surrounding hills). The local immigration officer placed me under 'hotel arrest' for my own safety. The following morning, hung-over as I had partied the night away at the 'christening' (or the Buddhist equivalent) of the daughter of a Nepalese couple I had met, I was escorted to the outskirts of town and sent back the way I had come. The immigration officer insisted that I should stop for absolutely nobody wearing uniform until I had left "this most dangerous area!" I made it back to Thimphu without further incident.

The weather for my trip was heavenly, the people charming and the scenery unmatched. I am extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to experience this extraordinary country as I did.