

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

Number 32

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT GCMG FRSE

Summer 2005

12th September 2005

Recent Developments in Bhutan

An Informal Talk by Michael Rutland

**** Please note change of venue! ****

Our annual opportunity to hear from Michael Rutland, the Society's Hon. Secretary and Bhutan's Hon. Consul to the UK, who lives in Bhutan for much of each year. Michael will speak about the changes and developments that have occurred over the past 12 months.

There is a lot going on in Bhutan at the moment – the promulgation and discussion of the Draft Constitution, the taking of a detailed census, two brand new Druk Air Airbuses in service and the long awaited consecration of the rebuilt and restored Taktsang Monastery (Tiger's Nest).

The intention is to provide plenty of opportunity for the audience to ask questions about any aspects of modern Bhutan which interest them.

Drinks available before the lecture

Monday 12th September 2005

7:00 pm for 7:30 pm *

** Please note the later than usual start time – this is to enable those wishing to drive into London to avoid the congestion charge (which does not apply after 6:30pm).*

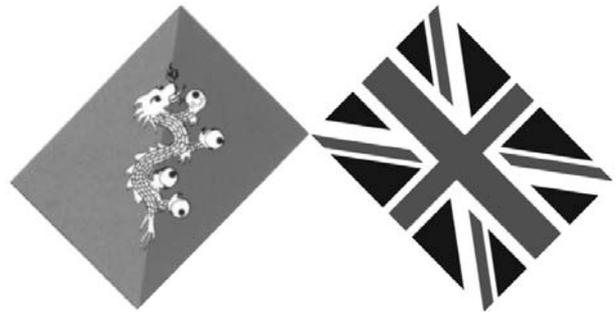
The Oriental Club (The Library)

Stratford Place, London SW1A 2HE

The Oriental Club is the imposing building at the northern end of Stratford Place, almost opposite Bond Street tube station. **Please note: Oriental Club rules do not allow the wearing of jeans and require gentlemen to wear jacket and tie!**

The 13th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society

21st October 2005



The 13th Annual Dinner of the Bhutan Society will take place on Friday 21st October 2005 at the National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London.

All Members and their friends are invited to join us for what is always a most enjoyable evening and a great way to catch up with old friends... and make new ones! Please see the enclosed flyer for details and a ticket application form.

Please also consider sponsoring, or part sponsoring, a ticket for a Bhutanese student to attend – see the application form for details or call Peter Li, the Annual Dinner Secretary, on: (01730) 893 829. Thank you.

Dates for your diary

Thursday 24th November 2005

Maureen Ponting, botanist and horticulturalist, will speak to the Society on the botany of Bhutan.

Venue: The National Liberal Club, London.

Full details to follow.

Saturday 17th December 2005

The Society plans to hold a reception to celebrate Bhutan's National Day, 17th December. We very much hope that the Guest of Honour will be H.M. Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck.

Details to follow. Please put this date in your diary!

This Newsletter is produced by Lucy & Bodo Hornberger to whom enquiries and contributions should be addressed.
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The Society's website is at 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.



Draft Constitution distributed to all Bhutanese

by Kinley Dorji, Kuensel (www.kuenselonline.com)

The Bhutanese people are literally turning the pages of a new era in history as the Kingdom's draft constitution is distributed and discussed around the country. The draft Constitution has been made widely accessible and available to every citizen, in preparation for a period of public consultation, to be followed by a referendum. The draft is also available on the Internet:

www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/constitution/constitution.htm

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has stressed that the Constitution was drafted with a single-minded focus to create a democratic political system best suited to Bhutan. He emphasised the need for all Bhutanese to understand the implications. In addition, His Majesty expressed satisfaction with the comprehensive rights and responsibilities prescribed for the Bhutanese people.

His Majesty stated that a two party system had been chosen after thorough debate. Multi party systems were studied carefully but it was felt that allowing each *dzongkhag* to establish a political party would not be conducive to political stability. A three-party system would also run the risk of becoming regionalized, leading to discord and problems. His Majesty confirmed that the government would fund the political parties through the Election Commission to ensure the integrity of the electoral process in Bhutan.

His Majesty indicated that he was aware of the widespread opinion that Bhutan was not ready for democracy because of the lack of political experience and the absence of the necessary institutions. He stressed that, while it was natural for people to have misgivings and the concerns were genuine, it was important to understand the political changes in the perspective of the current situation. Unlike other countries where Constitutions were drafted during difficult times, under pressure from political influences and interests, Bhutan was fortunate that the change came under no pressure or compulsion but at a time when the country enjoyed unprecedented peace and stability. Bhutan could not hope for a better or more auspicious moment for this historical development. His Majesty added that the essence of Bhutan's success in the past 30 years had been the ability to anticipate challenges and pre-empt problems, and that the Bhutanese people would never gain political experience until they took part in the new political system.

Prime minister, Lympo Yeshey Zimba, described the distribution of the Constitution as one of the most important events in the history of Bhutan, and the Chief Justice hailed it as "a shining symbol of the devolution of power by His Majesty that conveys the eternal message of justice, liberty, and equality to the citizens of Bhutan."

British High Commissioner visits Bhutan

Sir Michael Arthur KCMG, British High Commissioner to India, with Lady Arthur, paid an official visit to Bhutan from 16 - 22 May 2005. They were accompanied by Dr. Andrew Hall, Deputy High Commissioner, Eastern India, and Mrs. Hall, and by Mrs. Caroline Wilson, 1st Secretary (Political) at the High Commission.



HM Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck with (l to r) Michael Rutland, Caroline Wilson, Lady Arthur, Sir Michael Arthur, Mrs Hall & Andrew Hall

Sir Michael has been in post as British High Commissioner for a year and a half. Prior to taking up the appointment he and Lady Arthur familiarized themselves with life in India by staying for some weeks incognito with an 'untouchable' family in an Indian village.

During their visit to Thimphu Sir Michael and his party had an audience with HM The King and audiences with HM Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck (whose son is at St. Peter's College Oxford) and HM Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck (whose son is at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst). The High Commissioner and delegation also had meetings with Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuck, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and with the Prime Minister, Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba (whose daughter is at the University of Strathclyde). The delegation also had meetings with the President of the Bhutanese Chamber of Commerce & Industry, the Managing Director of Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) and the Editor of Kuensel. On the afternoon of their first day in Bhutan, the High Commissioner and his delegation were entertained to tea by Michael Rutland (Hon. Consul of Bhutan to the UK) and his family at their bungalow in Begana.

Sir Michael gave a televised interview to BBS and, at the end of their official duties, he, Lady Arthur and Caroline Wilson trekked from Thimphu to the airport over the Druk Path. Dr. and Mrs Hall drove to Eastern Bhutan and exited to Calcutta by road.

The visit was considered a great success by both the Royal Government of Bhutan and by the High Commissioner who was able to gain a good understanding of current developments, policies and problems in Bhutan. The visit further strengthened the warm and close relations between the UK and Bhutan.



News & Updates from the Bhutan Society



Bhutan Children's Media Centre

There have been so many articles in the western media in the past year about the effects of television on Bhutan, especially young Bhutanese.

Dorji Wangchuck, Director of the Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS), believes that young people need to be educated in television and other media to enable them to exercise common sense, intelligence and discretion in their use of this media. He believes that only if young people understand the modern media that are now flooding into Bhutan, will they be able to minimize the adverse effects.

Dorji Wangchuck is therefore setting up a Children's Media Centre in Thimphu to give young people the opportunity to use media creatively, for example by making their own films and programmes. This is a very praiseworthy initiative and represents an imaginative approach to a problem which so many journalists have found it fashionable to write about recently.

Promoting white water sports

by Kinley Dorji, Kuensel (www.kuenselonline.com)

Of the many tourists that visit Bhutan a handful of enthusiasts come to kayak and raft. River adventures can be packaged together with trekking and sightseeing in spring and autumn when the rivers are stable.

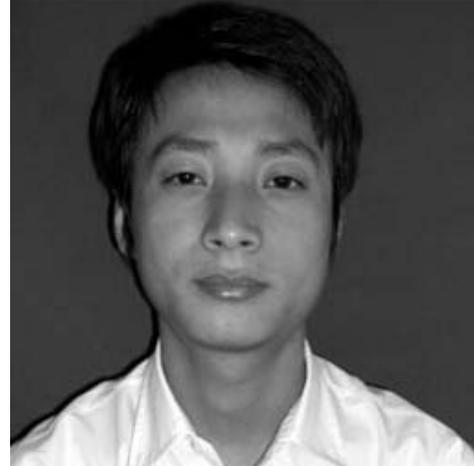
Bhutanese river systems provide a huge potential for canoeing, rafting and kayaking. A survey of Bhutan's rivers done with the help of overseas experts found that most of the country's rivers can be kayaked and some river sections are raftable. For example, sections of the Pochu and Mochu rivers in Punakha, the Dangchu in Wangdue, the Mangdechu in Trongsa the Chamkarchu, Durchu and the Tangchu in Bumthang and Tangmachu in Lhuentse can be rafted and kayaked.

Private tour company Lotus Adventure has been instrumental in promoting and pioneering white water sport in Bhutan, and the sport will receive a boost through the newly launched Bhutan Canoe Federation which has approval from the Bhutan Olympic Committee and is a member of the International Canoe Federation.



Kayaking on the Mangdue chhu between Jangthang and the Chazam (iron bridge)

In Memorandum Yeshey Nidup



A young Bhutanese student, Yeshey Nidup, who was being sponsored to attend university in Bangkok by Bhutan Society member Sabine Liebherr, was the victim of an unprovoked and extremely violent attack in Bangkok on 28th July. He, along with a German university student friend, was attacked by a gang of four men with knives. Yeshey Nidpu was taken to the intensive care unit of Bangkok's Rajvit Hospital, where he underwent several emergency operations, but tragically he died on 1st August without regaining consciousness. His body has been returned to Bhutan for cremation.

Yeshey, aged 23, had studied in Bangkok for the last three years, and was just reaching the successful conclusion of his degree course. He was an exceedingly hard working and cheerful young man who was well-liked by the other Bhutanese students studying in Bangkok. As the eldest of five children, he had from a young age shouldered the responsibility of caring for his three brothers and his sister. His untimely death is a great blow to the family, which is part of Michael Rutland's Bhutanese family.

No attack of this kind has ever before happened to a Bhutanese student in Thailand. It is hoped that the Bhutanese Government will press for a full and assiduous investigation by the Thai Police.

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland is currently in the UK. He will return to Bhutan on 20th September.

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He would be delighted to meet Members visiting Bhutan during the periods when he is there – telephone him when you are in Thimphu.

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Gross National Happiness: a personal view



By Nic Marks, nef (new economics foundation), London

Nic Marks is head of well-being research at the London-based think tank, nef (new economics foundation). The well-being programme seeks to address the question 'what would policy look like if people's well-being was its aim'. nef's "well-being manifesto" is available for download from their website: www.neweconomics.org

Last year I had the great pleasure of being asked to attend an international conference in Thimpu on the fascinating subject of Gross National Happiness (GNH). I can assure that it didn't take me long to find a way of accepting the offer and I wasn't disappointed – it was one of the most enlightening and purposeful conferences I have ever attended. Below is an outline of my understanding of what the Bhutanese mean by GNH and some of the challenges they face in terms of the impacts of globalisation.

The story of when the phrase Gross National Happiness was coined is like much of Bhutanese history – shrouded in mist. What is certain is that very soon after his accession HM King Jigme Singye Wangchuck became sceptical of the 'western' approach to development, and he is quoted as saying, in 1976, that "We have time to wait until our people are ready for the changes the outside world will bring". In a sense this really encapsulates the concept of GNH – a patient reflection, mindfulness even, on what is actually best for Bhutan. This view is still held within the Bhutanese government, with one minister stating clearly at the conference that it is not 'whether Bhutan can grow economically, it is whether we want to'.

GNH as a concept has caught the world's imagination and articles have been sketched in all manner of press from the Indian to the New York Times – but to be honest with varying degrees of accuracy. Many journalists seem to assume that it is an actual numeric index that the Bhutanese are seeking to maximise, which just goes to show how hard it is to step outside the western economic mindset. Instead GNH is more of a working philosophy, a touchstone for good governance if you like. The question that Bhutanese politicians and policy makers ask themselves is more 'what is good for the Bhutanese people' rather than (as in the West) 'what is good for the economy' or more cynically 'what will get me re-elected'.

There do however appear to be some real challenges lying ahead for the Bhutanese, not only in response to external effects of globalisation but also from a younger generation who are highly literate and have rising material expectations, not to mention the geo-political difficulties of the region. How the Bhutanese

government manages these huge challenges will define the future of this tiny kingdom. A policy of isolation looks increasingly hard to maintain as the Internet, satellite TV, tourism and the emergence of both India and China as world economic forces start to have an impact.

However, the signs are in some ways good as a quick look at neighbour Nepal, ravaged by civil unrest and culturally and environmentally polluted by tourism, will confirm. Indeed the global attention that the concept of GNH inspires, and the western allies that it brings, might well help Bhutanese protect themselves from us!

Bhutan in Yorkshire – part two!

The impressive Bhutanese Chorten which David Lascelles has created in the grounds of Harewood House, Yorkshire (see Issue 31), was formally consecrated on 5th April 2005 in a colourful and memorable day of ceremonies performed by Bhutanese monks. HRH The Prince of Wales, looking relaxed and happy just a few days before his marriage, was Guest of Honour.



Above: Traditional offerings on the chorten during the consecration



Left: HRH and Viscount Lascelles arrive at the chorten