

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

Number 36

President: Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, KT GCMG FRSE

Spring 2007

On Thursday 14th December, 2006 His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck handed over his responsibilities as Monarch and Head of State of Bhutan to the Crown Prince Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck who now assumes the full responsibilities of Head of State as the Fifth King of Bhutan. See Page 3...

Monday 5th March, 2007

Travels with a Microphone

Robin Lustig looks back over
17 years as a BBC broadcaster

Robin Lustig is one of the BBC's most senior radio presenters. As well as presenting the World Tonight, he also presents Newshour and Talking Point on the BBC World Service.

He studied politics at the University of Sussex and began his journalistic career as a Reuters correspondent in Madrid, Paris and Rome. He then spent 12 years at The Observer before moving into broadcasting in 1989. He has extensive experience of covering major world events for the BBC, and has broadcast live programmes from across the globe. Among the world leaders he has interviewed are Nelson Mandela, President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan, President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Kofi Annan and Tony Blair.

Robin visited Bhutan in May 2006 to report on Gross National Happiness. He has won a number of awards, including the 1998 Sony Silver Award for Talk/News Broadcaster of the Year.

Monday 5th March, 2007

6:30pm for 7:00pm

The National Liberal Club
Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

Drinks available before the lecture

Wednesday 28th March, 2007

Plant-worms from the Roof of the World

All you ever wanted to know about Yarza Gumbas (*Cordyceps sinensis*) but were afraid to ask!

Nigel Hywel-Jones has been working with insect fungi for more years than he would care to admit. For the last five years he has been working with colleagues in Bhutan on the problems concerning the illegal poaching of the valuable Chinese medicinal *Yarza Gumba*. In this talk he will introduce the fungus that is known to science as *Cordyceps sinensis*.

Nigel will describe how *Cordyceps* has gone from being an obscure herbal used by the high court of Chinese Emperors to a New Age Wonder Drug inspiring thousands of sites on the Internet (and worth many thousands of GBP per kilo!). He will describe its unique biology and ecology and put this into the context of its relevance to the people of Bhutan. There will be the opportunity to see, and possibly taste, samples!

Wednesday 28th March, 2007

6:30pm for 7:00pm

The Oriental Club
Stratford Place (off Oxford St.), London W1C 1ES

Drinks available before the lecture

PLEASE NOTE: Oriental Club rules require gentlemen to wear jacket and tie. No jeans!

The Society's website is at www.bhutansociety.org and carries information about the Society, news and events, an archive of Newsletters and a selection of interesting Bhutan-related links.
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E-mail: lee.elizabeth@btopenworld.com Tel: (01483) 455764



News & Updates from the Bhutan Society



A date for your diary:

The **15th Annual Dinner** of the Bhutan Society will be held on **Friday 26th October, 2007** at the National Liberal Club, Whitehall, London. Full details and an application form to follow in the Summer issue of the newsletter.

Images of the Himalaya

Bhutan Society member Richard Keeler and colleague David Barlow are having an **exhibition of photographs and coloured sketches of the Himalayas** at the Gallery of the Highgate Literary and Scientific Institution from April 20th to May 3rd, 2007.

There will be a number of images of Bhutan amongst the 80+ on display. Admission to the Gallery is free.

The Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution
11 South Grove, Highgate, London N6 6BS
Tel: (020) 8340 3343
Website: www.hlsi.net

Opening times:

Wednesday to Friday 1 pm to 5 pm

Saturday 11 am to 4 pm

Sunday 11 am to 5 pm



One of the photos to be included in the exhibition: A Bragpa woman from Mera in the far eastern part of Bhutan (1991)

Student Assistance Appeal

From time to time Bhutanese students in the UK ask if the Society can help them find a second hand computer laptop or desktop to assist them in their studies. These requests are occasional and not large in number. Any member who might be able to assist from time to time can contact Andrew Sutton (who coordinates student liaison for the Society) by e-mail at andrewsutton001@aol.com or via the Society, tel.: (020) 7580 2617.

Photo Exhibition benefits Trust Fund

The Society is delighted to announce that the photographic exhibition, organised by Baroness Dorothea Friesen at the Nehru Centre in London last October raised almost £1000 for the Bhutan Society Trust Fund. The Society is very grateful both to Baroness Friesen and to the photographers, Almerie Colloredo, Peter Spira and Harriet Denne.

The Bhutan Society Trust Fund was launched in 1994 and is a Registered Charity (No. 1041260). The Fund's aims are the relief of the poor, the sick and the handicapped, the advancement of education and culture, and support for other projects (e.g.: environmental initiatives) for the benefit of citizens of the Kingdom of Bhutan. The Trust Fund has successfully built up an endowment fund of £50,000 and the interest is used to assist a number of small and larger projects.

La Maison du Bhoutan

The first boutique specialising in the arts and crafts of Bhutan has opened in Paris. La Maison du Bhoutan is located in the 20th District and is run by a Bhutanese. In addition to traditional handicrafts, jewellery, incense, textiles and yak wool clothing, the boutique boasts sacred art and sculptures from both Bhutan & Tibet.

La Maison du Bhoutan
40 ter rue Olivier MØtra, Paris XXL.
(MØtro: Place des FØetes)
Tel. 06 27 60 70 34
www.lamaisondubhoutan.com
E-mail: la.maison.du.bhoutan@gmail.com

The Hon. Secretary Michael Rutland is currently in Bhutan. He will return to the UK in mid July. 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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Welcome to His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Fifth King of Bhutan



**Bhutan witnesses one of the most
emotional moments in Bhutanese history**

Kuensel, 15th December 2006

The time has now come for me to hand over my responsibilities to Trongsa Penlop Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, said His Majesty in a *kasho* (Royal Decree) issued on December 9th 2006. I am confident that a very bright future lies ahead for Bhutan with the leadership of a new King and a democratic system of government that is best suited for our country as enshrined under the Constitution. I have every confidence that there will be unprecedented progress and prosperity for our nation in the reign of our fifth King.

As the transition was formally announced on December 14th, the day was charged with emotion, and a special sitting of the Cabinet in Tashichhodzong was unable to articulate a comprehensive discussion. Cabinet members and guests that included the Chief Justice, the Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Chief Election Commissioner were overcome by emotion and sat in a long and stunned silence after His Majesty's announcement.

His Majesty reminded the Cabinet session that he had already announced the decision to the nation last December (2005) and repeated it many times. His Majesty pointed out that, as long as he himself continued to be King, the Crown Prince would not gain actual experience of dealing with issues and carrying out the responsibilities of a head of state. As parliamentary democracy was established in 2008 the country would enjoy peace and stability for several years and that would be a good period for the Fifth King and the new government to gain political experience.

His Majesty expressed his confidence that the Fifth Druk Gyalpo (King) was fully capable of carrying out his responsibilities. Judging by his performance as Crown Prince, his thinking, and his principles, His Majesty said he had no doubt that the Fifth Druk Gyalpo would serve his nation with selfless dedication. If the Crown Prince was not worthy, he would not have handed over his responsibilities just because the Crown Prince was his son.

The prime minister, Lyonpo Khandu Wangchuk, submitted to the meeting that he and the other members of the government had been aware of His Majesty's wishes but they were at a complete loss when they actually heard the royal command and received the royal decree.

It was not possible to list the phenomenal successes of His Majesty's reign that allowed Bhutan to stand proud in the comity of nations, he continued. The Bhutanese people enjoyed a better quality of life than ever before, the security and sovereignty of the country was assured, and the world admired Bhutan's enlightened policies that helped preserve its unique traditions, pristine environment, rich culture, and principle of Gross National Happiness. There could never be a more fortunate generation of people, he said.

Of destiny

Kuensel Editorial, 16th December 2006

Men see the present, great men see the future. We see through our tears and smiles, the birth of a new era with remarkable clarity. It represents, not just an auspicious occasion for Bhutan, but a unique event in history.

In handing over the responsibilities of state to his son and heir, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo has ushered in a new period of a dynasty that has, for 100 years, personified enlightened leadership and profound wisdom. His Majesty has ensured that we continue to be blessed with great leaders.

It is also a gesture of confidence in the Fifth Druk Gyalpo and in a new generation of Bhutanese. We saw the continuity of a sacred legacy in the wisdom and compassion that the Crown Prince portrayed as he met with people from every corner of the country to explain the political transformation taking place today.

The past three decades of Bhutanese history saw the unfolding of a vision that achieved the impossible in statecraft. His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck ascended the Throne as a young teenager under tragic circumstances and steered the kingdom through an era of unprecedented change that represented a fine balance of tradition and modernity.

As His Majesty's clear long-term vision continues to unfold we are poised for exciting change. Today's succession of the Druk Gyalpo is the first of historic transitions that will shape our future and ensure the well being of the people for all time. We will see the adoption of the first written Constitution and, along with it, the establishment of a parliamentary democracy.

The present generation of leaders were educated, trained and nurtured over the past decades. It was His Majesty who prepared the youth of Bhutan to take on the role of shaping the destiny of the kingdom. Now, given the opportunity to take the nation into the future, we celebrate the emergence of the Fifth Druk Gyalpo as a comforting personification of our past and an inspiration for the years ahead.

We already see in His Majesty the King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the legacy that true greatness lies in serving the people, not in ruling over them. Ultimately governance and succession is aimed at benefiting the people and the Druk Gyalpo will continue to be the custodian of the interests of the common people.

We do not mourn the departure of His Majesty as our Monarch but celebrate the achievement of his destiny. We have the incredible privilege of expressing our deep gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, our hopes in His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, and our unwavering faith in the sacred legacy that we call the Bhutanese system.

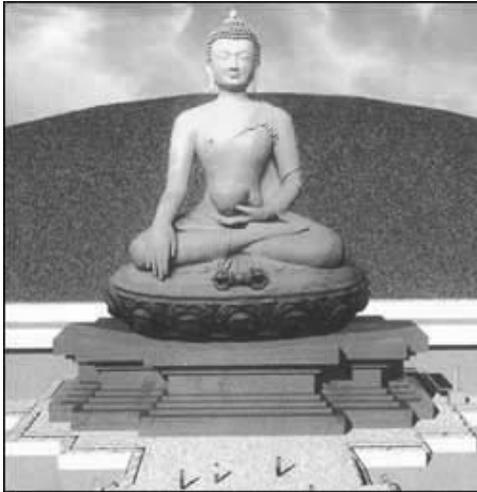


Work Begins on Giant Buddha

Bishal Rai, Kuensel

Preparations have begun for the building of a 169-foot statue of Buddha in Thimphu – perhaps the tallest Buddha image in the world!

Three excavators and a bulldozer are levelling the ground at Kuensel Phodrang on the hill overlooking the Thimphu valley and earthworks on the 4km approach road to the site have been completed. Work on the bronze statue of Buddha Dordenma, or the Vajra Throne Buddha, will start this winter.



An artist's impression of the 169-foot statue

The bronze statue and *thri* (throne) will incorporate 17 tiers of *lhakhangs* (temples), housing among other treasures 25,000 12-inch copper and gold gilded images of Buddha Dordenma, eight 10-foot standing bodhisattvas, and eight 10-foot sitting medicinal Buddhas. The area from the third storey to the top of the statue will accommodate 100,000 eight-inch statues of Buddha Dordenma.

Bhutanese sculptors have designed the statue and the interior of the temples. Aerosun Corporation, a Chinese company based in Nanjing, China, will do the construction. The fabrication, shipping and assembly of the statue in Thimphu will cost US\$ 20 million, largely funded by Singaporean billionaire, Rinchen Peter Teo. The site will also have public galleries, restaurants, monks' quarters, a camping ground and picnic spots. The surrounding area is to be made a national park.

Tiger Sightings

A royal Bengal tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*), which in Bhutan is found up to 4000m, was spotted near Chendebji chorten on October 6th, 2006!

Bengal tigers have also been seen in the past year at Chelela (the pass between Paro and Haa) and in the mountains above Tangu, just north of Thimphu.

A Mender of Soles

Kesang Dema, Kuensel

When Dalan Ram arrived in Trashigang town recently the residents were so delighted they literally greeted him in their dancing shoes. Within days news of his arrival spread and people of all walks of life flocked to him to mend their footwear.

Dalan Ram's arrival as the new cobbler has brought respite to many a soul in Trashigang town, which was without a shoe mender for more than five years. During those years the people often took a bag of shoes for repair when they travelled to Samdrup Jongkhar and Phuentsholing. Those who didn't have the opportunity, or could not afford, to travel had little choice but to reluctantly dispose of their worn and broken shoes.

The new cobbler is of greatest benefit to Trashigang's rural folk who do more walking. I cannot afford to buy more than one pair of shoes each for myself and my family in a year, said Thinley, adding that farm works wore out shoes very fast.

A farmer and father of three said that he repaired his children's school shoes using a metal spine of an old umbrella as a needle. But the thread used to stitch the shoes is not strong and it hardly lasts, he complained.

Trashigang's first cobbler was Bhola Ram from Bihar, India. He mended shoes for the people of Trashigang, Mongar and Trashiyangtse for more than three decades. But five years ago he fell sick and returned home. His son continued the business for a year but then left too.

Dalan Ram, who worked in Thimphu for ten years, says he is proud to carry out his family business in Trashigang. Thimphu is a very busy place and you sometimes come across aggressive people. But here everybody is very nice, he explained.

With materials brought from Kolkata, India, his prices range from Nu.10 (approx. £0.10) for polishing to Nu.200 (approx. £2.30) for fitting soles.

Town *chimi* Kinzang Namgay said that the town committee had asked the government for a cobbler. Bhutanese youth are not willing to take up such a profession, he said.

Druk Air introduces Mountain Flights

Druk Air are offering special mountain sightseeing flights from October to March. Entitled Kingdom from the Sky the flights last for 1 hour and make a rough figure eight route across the length of the country. A fantastic opportunity to experience a bird's eye view of some of the otherwise inaccessible wonders of Bhutan

Window seats (the only seats available) cost US\$80-\$100. Those travelling in a group may wish to charter the plane for a fee of US\$3000. See: www.drukair.com.bt