

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

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Update on earthquake relief

In the eastern districts of Mongar and Trashigang, which experienced the most severe consequences of the earthquake last September, many family homes as well as schools, temples and basic health units were destroyed. Many people were left traumatized as well as homeless, though fortunately the death toll was not as great as it might have been.

His Majesty travelled to the affected areas and supervised the distribution of the Earthquake Relief 'Kidu' Fund to those families, to rebuild damaged homes and provide temporary shelter for those left homeless.

His Majesty's Relief Fund continues to provide Corrugated Galvanized Iron (CGI) sheets for roofing, timber, tents, blankets, rice, utensils, and clothing for the disaster struck families. Another priority is the building of single storied cottages for those whose homes were destroyed by the earthquake. This task was carried out by the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) under the instructions of His Majesty.



Thanks to the concern of friends of Bhutan around the world, and in particular the great generosity of members of the Bhutan Society of the UK, who together donated 1.02 million Ngultrums to His Majesty's Earthquake Relief 'Kidu' Fund, the disaster affected families are seeing a new beginning. Many thanks to all who donated so generously. The money, allocated and distributed under HM The King's personal supervision, has been well spent.

Royal visit to Bhutan

HRH Prince Andrew, Duke of York, was in Bhutan from 14th to 18th March on a private visit at the invitation of HM The King. During his visit he enjoyed an audience with His Majesty, who he had previously met in Thailand on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of King Bhumibol of Thailand.



The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lyonpo Ugyen Tshering, hosted an informal dinner in his honour at the new Tashi Taj Hotel in Thimphu, and on the following day, the Foreign Secretary hosted an informal dinner for the Duke of York at Shewaling Hotel in Paro (see photo). On both these occasions he was able to discuss various aspects of Bhutan's development and education policies. On his final day in Bhutan, Prince Andrew walked up to the Taktsang (Tigers Nest) Temple. HRH The Duke of York travelled to Bhutan from Kolkata, where he had been on official business as the United Kingdom's Representative for Trade and Industry.

Date for the diary

***The Annual Dinner of the Society
will take place on Friday 17
September 2010 at The
Travellers Club in London.***

More details in next Newsletter

News and Updates

New guidelines for tourists re-entering India

According to new guidelines on Tourist Visas for INDIA, a two months gap between two visits is now mandatory for foreigners holding a long term multi-entry Tourist Visa. However, to facilitate bona-fide tourists, it has since been decided that foreigners holding a Tourist Visa who, after initial entry into India, plan to visit another country and then re-enter India before finally exiting, may be permitted two or three entries, subject to their submission of a detailed itinerary and supporting documentation (e.g. ticket bookings).

Therefore any tourists visiting Bhutan using India as an entry as well as exit point would be required to:

A. When tourists yet to process their Indian Visa or are en-route

1. While processing for their Indian Visa at Indian Embassy/Missions/Consular in their country, it will be necessary to give a full itinerary (Entry/re-entry/exit) and request for authorization of re-entry into India before the two months gap.
2. If the Indian Visa is already processed and there is no authorization for re-entry, than it is necessary to obtain re-entry approval from the Foreigner Registration Record Office (FRRO) at an Indian International airport.

B. When tourists who are already in Bhutan, but do not have re-entry authorization within the two months gap

1. Obtain re-entry authorization which can be processed through the Indian Embassy in Thimphu
2. Documents required: -
 - Original passport; copy of the passport; copy of air tickets
 - Copy of the passport page which contains Indian Immigration stamped if exited from the airport
3. Nu. 480 per authorization will be charged.

It is possible India may revise these rules ... you should keep informed by visiting the Indian High Commission web site

New destination for Druk Air

Druk Air is planning to add a new stop at Guwahati on its existing route from Paro to Bangkok. Guwahati, a prominent business destination for many Bhutanese, is the capital of the neighbouring Indian state of Assam.

Druk Air has confirmed that the national airline will commence flight operations by October this year and later these will be extended to Patna in India. The plan is to have two flights a week in the sector. The recent lifting of the travel advisory tag from Guwahati, following several years of security concerns along the Indo-Bhutan border, will enable business people and students to move more freely in Assam. "The situation has improved greatly over a few months," said Dasho Tshering Wangda, Consul General

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of the Bhutan Consulate at Kolkota. The Chirag district in Assam which is a popular business destination from Bhutan and bore the consequences of the ban, is happy with the news of the lift.

If the projects work out, then Bhutan will be connected with all major business destinations in the region. The Indian media, quoting the Consul General, said the number of tourists visiting Bhutan will increase with the introduction of the new flight to Guwahati, a city considered as the gateway to north-east India.

Last year, Druk Air began its Bagdogra flight, which has increased the traffic with the business hub of India's north eastern region, Siliguri. The Bagdogra flight also brought to Bhutan many tourists who visited Darjeeling.

MEETING REPORT

ARTISTS IN PARADISE

On April 13, 2010, many members and friends of the Society were pleased to be able to attend a viewing of the works of artist and architect Douglas Patterson currently being exhibited at the National Theatre, South Bank London.

During the past five years Doug Patterson has travelled extensively drawing and painting the architecture and landscapes of the Christian Orthodox monasteries of Mont Athos and Meteora in Greece, the Buddhist dzongs of Bhutan, and the Islamic mosques of north Africa and northern India.

These journeys were inspired by the 18th and 19th travellers Vasileio Gregorovic Barsky, Samuel Davis, and Hercules Brabazon Brabazon, who also travelled to the same locations to record in paintings and drawings the three great world faiths. Of particular interest to members will be the drawings and paintings of all 20 dzongs in Bhutan. The culmination of this work is a one man show at the National Theatre in London from March 29 until May 10, 2010. In addition, the artist will also be exhibiting about 120 of his other works.



Also on sale (£20 each) will be copies of a recently finished collection of water colours illustrating the Kingdom of Bhutan, which have been published as an A6 fold out illustrated and leather bound book. The proceeds of the sale of these sketch books will be donated to the Tarayana Foundation, a non-profit organization working to uplift and enhance the lives of people in rural communities in Bhutan. It was established in 2003 by Her Majesty the Queen, Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, as a potential solution to the problems of the disadvantaged that she witnessed first hand during her tours to the remote corners of the nation. The Foundation helps these communities achieve self sufficiency through small and targeted interventions.

Doug Patterson also spoke to members at an evening meeting of the Society held at The Oriental Club in London on Tuesday 20 April, 2010, where he talked about his work and travels in

the footprints of these three great artist travellers. In doing so he has created his own contemporary record, in drawings and paintings of the architecture and landscapes which form his own personal insight into the spiritual world of these very private places of worship.

NEWS FROM THE

MAJOR TOURISM REFORMS ANNOUNCED

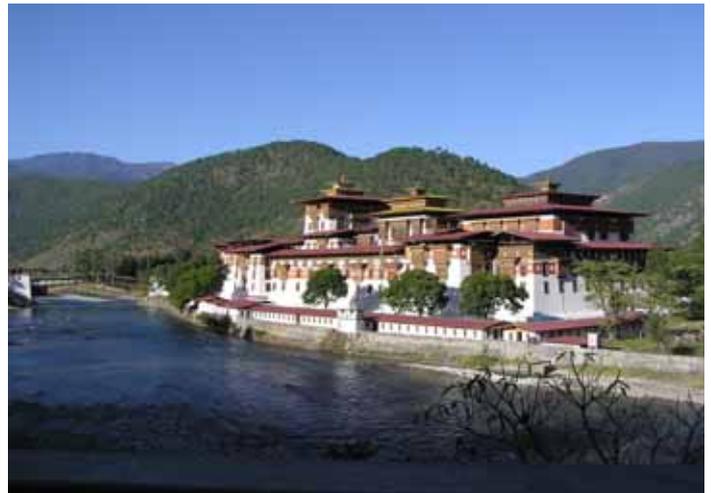
Bhutan will be marketed as a high quality, low impact tourist destination which draws visitors throughout the year. This will be achieved by building the necessary infrastructure, setting high benchmarks for delivery of services, diversifying products, and ensuring that its benefits reach larger segments of the population. These were the conclusions of a joint consultative meeting of stakeholders of tourism and the Government in Thimphu recently.

Bhutan will be positioned as a responsible, unique and quality destination anchored on the Gross National Happiness (GNH) philosophy and with minimum negative impact on natural and cultural heritage. This approach will be adopted to attract up to 100,000 tourists by 2012. On the supply creation front, land for the new development areas will be identified, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will be encouraged to develop hotels and resorts. Heritage properties and home stays will be developed through private and community partnerships. The tariff will be raised from US\$ 200 per person per day to US\$ 250 from 2011. Tourism infrastructure will be developed in three areas – in the centre (Bumthang and Trongsa), east (Trashiyangtse and Trashigang) and the south (Manas and Zhemgang). Lands are being released to develop hotels in these areas. Tourists will soon be able to enter and exit through Samdrup Jongkhar and Gelephu while Merak and Sakten are being opened to tourism. Aviation capacities will be built internationally and locally with domestic helicopter/airline services beginning soon to key destinations. Protection of environment, culture and communities will be emphasised, and tour guides and operators will be certificated. Amenities for visa processing online will be made, credit card and tourist information will be developed and serious efforts will be made to remove traditional off-season and peak season tags that have adversely affected tourist inflow. Outlining the Government's visions and plans, Prime Minister Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley urged the stakeholders to think of the bigger picture by transcending individual interests. Bhutan's status as a "special and unique" destination must be preserved at all costs. The achievements so far have not been very laudable, he said. In its 36 years, tourism's contribution to the GDP was only six percent and the employment generated only two percent of the total.

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Moreover, it was also highly concentrated in the west where Paro, Punakha and Thimphu alone took a significant 90% of the bed nights. The infrastructure was also not very well developed. "There is so much more we have to do for a country boasting high quality, low volume tourism," he said. To improve services in the hospitality industry, hotels will be classified on the basis of stars and their facilities upgraded. Mandatory service standards will be developed and strictly implemented. A capacity for an additional 2,500 beds will be created.

The Prime Minister also highlighted the need for better ethics among stakeholders. "Tourists should not be going back from our country with obligations to meet favours sought by guides," Lyonchhen Jigmi Y. Thinley said, "they need to be going back filled with happiness." Likewise, guides taking commissions from shops which sold goods to tourists, was tantamount to cheating and was unfair to those which did not stoop to this practice.



There was much to be desired on the behaviour front also. With Bhutanese culture being the predominant reason for tourists coming to Bhutan, this should be reflected in their conduct and dress. "If it is Bhutanese culture that is being sold to tourists and if Bhutan is to lose its culture, what is there left to promote?" the Prime Minister asked. Of Bhutan's approx. 1,300 tour guides, barely five percent were trained and professional.

The Prime Minister also asked the guides and hotels to help not portray Bhutan as a sex destination. The hotels should also be hygienic so that Bhutan does not earn disrepute for being health-wise, unsafe for tourists. Health standards must be set and monitored. About 68% of tourists visiting Bhutan are reported to rate services as good. However this was not considered good enough for a country that marketed itself as a high-end destination. The tour operators, hoteliers and handicraft sellers responded to the Prime Minister by confirming that these practices would be stopped immediately through strict monitoring, vigilance and punitive actions taken if needed.

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Wet or dry?

Today's rural scenery in Bhutan (except in Thimphu!) has owed much to the fact that there are two categories of land - *chuzhing*, or wet land for the growing of crops, and *kamzhing*, or dry land. Building may only take place on '*kamzhing*'. Until now it has been quite difficult to re-categorise '*chuzhing*' as '*kamzhing*', thus protecting land from buildings.

Under the Land Act of 2007, wet land may only be converted to dry land if the applicant has no other land on which to build a house. Under a draft National Policy proposed by the Land Commission, it will become much easier to re-categorise the wet land. Naturally, dry land sells for very much higher amounts than wet land. The Land Commission's head of survey said that 'there are many areas where land is registered as '*chuzhing*' and as a result of the blanket restriction they cannot be used for any other activity. At the moment, as visitors will have noticed, Bhutan is experiencing a building boom, and this is likely to continue.

Increased school fees cause concern

The tuition fees in the private schools have been increased by Nu. 6,000 to a minimum of Nu. 30,000 in a year. This has left many parents worried that they may not be able to continue providing education for their children in this way. However proprietors say that the school has to increase the fees to retain good teachers. More than half of the students who passed the Government Class X examinations (GCSE equivalent) failed to qualify for the limited number of Class XI places in Government schools. Perception among parents, both urban and rural, is that unless their children can obtain Class XI and XII exam passes, their future is bleak.

Parents could be encouraged to see that the opportunities for their children after Class X are very good through the various Vocational Training programmes which have been created by the Government. However, the mind set these days among both parents and students is that Vocation Training is undesirable and 'second class' despite the fact that Bhutan today needs vocational skills much more than it needs academic degrees!

Modern marriages

One thing modern parents do not want to remember about their children's wedding is the bill. The average wedding in Bhutan now costs more than Nu 200,000, with the bride's kira costing around Nu 100,000, catering another Nu 80,000, and hiring a local dance troupe to keep your guests entertained could cost a further Nu 8,000.

Traditionally a marriage was not a big affair. If you liked somebody, you start to live together, although in some parts of Bhutan there was the occasional negotiation over a bottle of ara! Most weddings in Bhutan are small ceremonies performed by a monk or other religious leader. Friends and family gather and bring gifts to the couple. In eastern and southern Bhutan the wife will go to live in the husband's house, in western Bhutan it is the opposite.



The 'Endless Knot' - one of the eight auspicious Buddhist signs is also a symbol of endless love, happiness and prosperity

Over time, marriages have become a symbol of status in the society and most modern parents want the social institution to be recognized, so attempting to secure the lives of their children with a grand wedding event. However among some young people there is still an element of caution.

Many would prefer to have a quiet family get-together because "we never know how the marriage would end.".....

Kencho Cho Sum Lhakhang gutted by fire

Kencho Cho Sum Lhakhang, one of the most sacred Lhakhangs in Bumthang has been burnt to the ground. The fire started from a butter lamp, which fell on the floor inside the Lhakhang. After carrying out damage assessment the police said the fire had not damaged any sacred relics or Nangtens.

Kencho Cho Sum Lhakhang is located five km from Chamkhar. It was built in the 9th century by Thrisung Deutsen and is one of the oldest temples in Bhutan. Outside the entrance is a stone pillar thought to be a prehistoric monolith. The temple is on a popular visitors' walk around the valley, and is near Tamzhing Monastery.

Conservation activities in Bhutan

The Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) launched two books titled **‘Bhutan’s Natural Heritage: A Legacy of the Monarchs’** and **“Nature, Wildlife and People: Living with Nature in Phobjikha Conservation Area”** on 21 February 2010, on His Majesty’s 30th Birth anniversary. The Minister of Agriculture and Forest, Lyonpo (Dr.) Pema Gyamtsho, launched the books in Hotel Taj Tashi, Thimphu. The event was attended by several members of the Parliament, dignitaries and officials of the Royal Government and representatives of the International and National NGOs.



Bhutan is richly endowed in its natural heritage and has brought the country to the forefront of global environmental conservation. Through these publications, RSPN wishes to bring out the extraordinary contributions of the Kings of Bhutan in safeguarding its environment and natural heritage whilst also taking stock of Bhutan’s natural resources and the challenges being faced in sustaining them. In particular, the book **“Bhutan’s Natural Heritage: A Legacy of the Monarchs”** calls on the Royal Government and the Bhutanese for continued efforts to preserve their natural environment especially in the context of the fragile Himalayan ecosystem and the vulnerability to disasters. A total of 3000 copies have been printed, of

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which 1000 will be available free to schools, and non-profit entities. The remaining 2000 will be put on sale through various book stores. Money raised from sales will be used for similar publications of RSPN and the publication of this one was made possible with financial support from the Embassy of Finland, New Delhi.

“Nature, Wildlife and People: Living with Nature in Phobjikha Conservation Area” is an educational publication based on information generated from several years of RSPN’s engagement in conservation of Phobjikha. The book provides holistic understanding of the natural environment and the socio-cultural dimensions in Phobjikha. Although the book was developed for use within Phobjikha, it can be an useful resource to outsiders. The book is available both in English and Dzongkha language. However, more copies in Dzongkha language suggest RSPN’s emphasis on educating the local communities. This initiative is part of RSPN’s efforts in strengthening Phobjikha’s status as a conservation area supported by MacArthur Foundation, USA.

RSPN was founded as a citizen based non-profit environment organization in 1986 and works on environment conservation and sustainable development throughout the country. RSPN programmes are based on its five year plan and include species, ecosystem, and community based conservation programmes outside the protected areas system.

Environment Education continues to be an important programme involving students/individuals in schools, institutions, and communities through out the country.



Regular advocacy programmes on emerging problems are also carried out with the help of local volunteers and members. Efforts include waste cleanup, networking and collaboration with

relevant national and international agencies.

Further information about the activities of RSPN can be found on/downloaded from their web site www.rspnbhutan.org

Profile: Bhutanese in the UK

Continuing our series of profiles of Bhutanese studying and/or working in the UK. Yeshey Lhendup talks about his life and experiences here.

1: What course are you studying in London?

I am working towards an M Sc. in Urban Economic Development at University College London. The course looks at economic issues facing urban areas and the challenges of managing a city economy. Bhutan is a rapidly urbanizing country with over 50 % of the population expected to live in towns by the year 2020. Many people are now leaving their villages for such urban areas in search of a better life which has resulted in urban poverty increasing at a higher rate. With this course, I hope to get a better understanding of the dynamics between a city economy and urban poverty.



2: What is your job in Thimphu? And how will the course help with your job?

Before coming to the UK, I worked in the Office of the Gyalpoi Zimpon (Welfare Secretariat of His Majesty) for the past two years. The office is the main link between the Monarch and the people. Since I joined this office, I have worked mainly on poverty issues in rural areas. I travelled around Bhutan to identify people living in absolute poverty requiring immediate help, mostly older people without children, then document and present the information to enable further courses of action to be taken. On my return to Bhutan, I will be looking at issues of urban poverty where the causes are completely different – most often related to low-income, unemployment and housing problems.

3: Is the course what you expected? Is it hard work?

Yes, in the sense that it has focused on economic issues at the city level which is what I expected, but the British system of education is not. I expected the course to be structured but it is more designed towards encouraging independent learning. You are given a long reading list and are expected to do get on with that task on your own. However, the course is very intensive as it is only one year long. We have to cover many subjects in nine months and also work on a dissertation for the remainder of the year. We barely have time to do anything else!

4: Who else is on the course? Do you all learn from one another?

My class is small - only 14 of us - which is great because you get to know one another very well. Even though I am studying in London, of the 14 students only four are British . The class is very diverse and we all learn a great deal from one another.

5: What is the subject of your dissertation?

I have not yet decided, but it will definitely be on a topic related to urban poverty in Bhutan – possibly affordable housing for low-income people, currently one of the biggest challenges facing Thimphu.

6: Have you seen much of London and the rest of the UK?

Unfortunately no, not to date. The only places I have visited outside London are Windsor and Oxford; both these places were beautiful. I definitely plan to travel a lot more before I leave for Bhutan – probably in the summer.

7: What has surprised you most?

I am surprised at the variety of people in London, especially the number of South Asians in the UK. I had heard that London was a diverse city but never imagined that it would be to this extent. Also, while London does have some low-income areas, it does not have a “ghetto” which has become a defining characteristic of many big cities. And the public transportation system – both buses and trains – are very efficient.

8: and what - apart from loved ones - will you be most pleased to see or have when you return home?

Everything else – the clean air, the greenery, the landscape, the food, the culture, and most of all, the people.

New trade routes will benefit eastern and central Bhutan

Three trucks laden with mandarins harvested from eastern Bhutan made their way through the Indian state of Meghalaya to Bangladesh recently thus marking the opening of the new route to Tamabil port in Bangladesh.



The new Tamabil port will benefit exporters particularly from eastern Bhutan and also provide an alternate route for central Bhutan. In the past, exports from the east had to be routed through Samdrup Jongkhar to Phuentsholing and then exported to Bangladesh. It means that a total distance of about 430 km has been brought down to about 280 km. The opening of the Tamabil port was agreed during the visit of Bangladeshi Prime Minister to Bhutan last December, when the two countries renewed the trade agreement and where the number of products for trading was also increased.

While mandarins are the main export to Bangladesh, with Bhutan producing an average of about 100,000 tons of the fruit annually, the route will also be used for export of other agricultural products.

Internet cafés - a changing need?

Internet café business apparently is no longer as lucrative as it used to be. Café owners, reminiscing about the good old days, say that with increasing competition and more people using dial up Internet services at home, they barely survive in the market. Cafe owners say that most of their customers are now tourists and students from outside Thimphu.

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NOTE

If you have not already done so, we would appreciate you sending your latest e-mail address to the Membership Secretary at:

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who will then add it to the database. There is no plan for the Society to go 'paperless' but there are times when it could be very convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.

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