

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER



NUMBER 46

PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

SPRING 2012

Forthcoming Meetings

Archaeology in Bhutan
7 pm Monday 21 May 2012
Speaker: Kuenga Wangmo

Kuenga Wangmo will talk about the beginnings of archaeology in Bhutan and the potential for its development. Having taken a degree at Harvard and then worked for a doctorate at Cambridge, Kuenga Wangmo is now at the Courtauld Institute of Art. In addition to research in Bhutan, she has worked on archaeological sites in South India (early Iron Age) and Virginia U.S.A. (Woodland Period).

Environmental Conservation in Bhutan – the Middle Path to Happiness?

7pm Tuesday 3 July 2012
Speaker: Nawang Gyeltshen

Nawang Gyeltshen will speak about Bhutan's vision for conservation, the political commitment, the sacrifices involved and the challenges faced. With seven years of experience in forests and conservation, Nawang Gyeltshen is currently on sabbatical leave from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests and studying for an MPhil in Conservation Leadership at the University of Cambridge. He plans to return to the Ministry and work on the development of sound and practical conservation policies. He is particularly interested in community participation, sustainable livelihoods and environmental governance.

Both meetings will be held at The National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

Drinks will be available from 6.30pm



Their Majesties, the King and Queen of Bhutan arriving at the Society's 20th Anniversary Dinner

See pages 3 for more pictures

New Horizons for Bhutan airlines

"Mission accomplished and a moment to celebrate," said Phala Dorji, Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority in Bhutan, as the nation witnessed a new era in Bhutanese aviation history at Paro airport in December, during the inaugural domestic flights of Druk Air and Tashi Air. The official party, comprising senior government officials, media personnel and legislators, enjoyed the experience of one of the first commercial flights to Bathpalathang in Bumthang and to Yonphula in Tashigang. "I never thought that I would be flying over these mountains. This is the place where I was born and brought up," said Dasho (Dr) Sonam Tenzin, Works and Human Settlement Secretary. He reminisced of the past, when it used to take him nine days to walk from Bumthang to Thimphu. "Today I covered the same distance in 25 minutes."

The two airlines will provide flight schedules alternately on four days a week, Tashi Air will fly on Wednesdays and Saturdays and Druk Air on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This new domestic air service could prove of great interest to tourists without the time or the inclination to undertake the road journeys which currently take several days. It will also provide a fantastic opportunity to experience a bird's eye view of some of the otherwise inaccessible views of Bhutan. Druk Air has also announced it plans to introduce twice weekly flights from Paro to Singapore from May 17 onwards.

NEWS AND UPDATES

Book Review

FORTRESS MONASTERIES OF THE HIMALAYAS

Peter Harrison

Illustrated by Peter Dennis

Osprey Publishing

ISBN 978-1-84908-396-6

64pp; illustrated - drawings and photographs

Peter Harrison has produced a delightful commentary on the fortress monasteries found in Tibet, Ladakh, Nepal and Bhutan in the Himalayas. He recounts their development and the history of the region, acknowledging that research was 'problematical' as written material is limited and plans are rarely recorded builders and repairers relying on their experience, doubtless free of the demands of any local authority planning committees.

We learn that the Buddhist influence spread from Tibet which itself was unified in 9th century (AD). Dzongs - stone and mud brick fortresses - were built in Tibet's provinces to consolidate control. Two of the most prominent dzongs remaining today are those in Gyantse, dating from the 14th century and the Potala whose construction began in 1645. The network of dzongs in Bhutan was established by the Shabdrung, Nagawang Namgyal (himself born in Tibet), in the 17th century. By the end of the 11th century there were some 108 monasteries in Ladakh but then threats from Muslim neighbours encouraged the consolidation of many monasteries with local forts, usually on higher ground, by the 16th century. The kingdom of Mustang, now part of Nepal but substantially surrounded by Tibet, has fortifications in the capital and various of its outlying monasteries

Mr Harrison describes these developments and many later events. He also helps us to understand what remains today after the significant ravages of the Chinese 'cultural revolution' in Tibet. The book is well illustrated with contemporary and historical photographs, paintings, drawings and maps as well as some of Peter Dennis' impressions of how things once were.

The publisher, Osprey, has related titles on Japanese and Chinese fortifications.

Andrew Sutton

Award made to the Disabled Person's Association

Some members may remember meeting Dr. Sanga Dorji, a blind physiotherapist who studied in the UK and then set up a Physiotherapy Department in Bhutan. With considerable initiative and energy he has now founded the Disabled Person's Association of Bhutan. The Association has managed to address successfully the many bureaucratic challenges and has been registered officially under Bhutan's Civil Society Organizations registration system, which ensures organizational and financial supervision.

However there was a need for some seed funding for the Association. In making a donation of £2,000 to the Association, Linda Li -Davies, Chairman of The Bhutan Society Trust Fund, said, "The work of Sanga Dorji is known to the Trustees, and they were unanimous in their decision to provide this grant to enable him to develop the aims of the Association."



Michael Rutland presenting the cheque to Dr Sanga Dorji at the opening of their new offices in Thimphu last December

Unlike in other parts of the world, Bhutan does not have a law that requires buildings serving the public to install access to wheelchairs, elevators and services for people with disabilities. Such facilities are seen as crucial to allow people with disabilities to be able to work, learn and partake in recreational activities with and as any average person. These are some of the issues the Disabled Persons' Association of Bhutan intends to advocate.

For more information about the Association, visit: <http://www.dpab.org.bt>

The Society's 20th Annual Dinner

The Annual Dinner to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Bhutan Society held at Inner Temple Hall in London on 25th November, 2011, was a great success. Their Majesties the King and Queen of Bhutan were our special guests and other guests included Ambassadors and representatives of several European Societies. Many Bhutanese students also attended along with our members and their guests. The photographs below reflect this joyous celebratory evening together.



NEWS FROM THE

RMA insists Government reconsider its expenditure

Daw Tenzin, Governor of Royal Monetary Authority (RMA) in Bhutan fears debt management has become a critical issue for the country. He has asked the Government to reconsider its spending, taxation measures and unnecessary expenditure, and instead to adopt measures to save the economy from diving into serious debt position. "It would only mean the economy would worsen, if measures aren't taken," said Daw Tenzin.

As of today, the country has a significant debt in Indian rupees, including borrowings from the Government of India's line of credit The State Bank of India's overdraft facility to the country was recently liquidated by selling USD 200M from RMA's reserves. This was done to provide respite to the crunch, and cover the hydropower debt repayment. The sale, however, failed to cover the full repayment required necessitating the RMA to enter into further credit arrangements with The Standard Bank of India.

"These are serious times for the economy," Daw Tenzin said. "The Government needs to adopt austerity measures, cut spending and rationalise taxation, before it becomes a sovereign debt issue". While countries like China have a current account surplus since they mostly export and save, the Bhutanese economy is importing as well as spending.

In his recent statement to the Government he said that Bhutan's sustainable growth must be accompanied by employment generation that is increasingly financed through national savings. "The income from hydropower, once the major projects are commissioned, may not be able to meet the debt repayment and expenditure in other areas, if the present trend continues," he said.

The country's reserves, he said, were mostly built through grants and aid, with small inflows from tourism. "Austerity measures are painful, but the Government as well as the public should look at the larger interest," he said, adding that people should be willing to pay taxes, save more and reduce spending. "It must be considered something as certain as death."

Gross National Happiness (GNH)

The Royal Government of Bhutan in 2005 made the decision to develop GNH indicators in order to move the concept of GNH from the point of academic discourse to a measurable one. The key areas of GNH fall within the domains of psychological well-being, health, time use, education, culture, good governance, ecology, community vitality and living standards. Using these criteria, the Centre of Bhutan Studies (CBS) developed a questionnaire, carried out various pilot studies and in April 2010 started a comprehensive survey throughout Bhutan. It took nine months to complete the survey and it took 3 hours on average to complete each questionnaire. Below are just a few of the results so far:

1. TIME USE

- On a national level, Bhutanese are spending about 35 percent of their 24 hour cycle on sleep, about 36 percent on work, and about 32 percent on 'non-work'*.
- Bhutanese females sleep more, on average, than male counterparts, but devote more time to work in a day. However males tend to spend more time on a category described as 'non-work'. The average time urban males spend on 'non-work' is 552 minutes, urban females spend 471 minutes on 'non-work'
- Both sexes spend around two hours a day watching television.
- Residents of Trashiyangtse spend the most time working with 568 minutes/day. The least time spent on work is in Paro (404 minutes)
- Males devote an average of 100 minutes to prayer, while women devote 79. However the survey also shows that the amount of time spent on prayer increases with age, or as household income decreases.
- The armed forces, the national workforce, and monks sleep the least among occupations in Bhutan. Armed forces put in only 409 minutes of sleep. Farmers, the unemployed, and students sleep the most.

2. DOMA CHEWING, SMOKING AND DRINKING

- Bhutanese currently consume much more doma and alcohol than cigarettes. On average 60 per cent of respondents say they currently chew doma, 41 percent consume alcohol and 4.6 percent smoke cigarettes.
- Gender is a significant factor for the type of substance consumed. While more females chew doma, a significantly higher percentage of males drink alcohol and smoke cigarettes.
- Smoking is more prevalent in urban Bhutan at 7.7 percent, compared to rural Bhutan's 3.4 percent, but alcohol and doma consumption is generally higher in rural Bhutan.
- Doma chewing is highest in the 26-30 age group, with 68 percent engaged in the habit. Alcohol consumption is highest between the ages of 36-40 at 46.3 percent.
- Smoking is most prevalent in the younger 21-25 age group, with 9.2 percent saying they smoke cigarettes.
- Smoking also increases as household income increases. In terms of occupation, civil servants are in the top three, when it comes to the consumption of both alcohol and cigarettes.

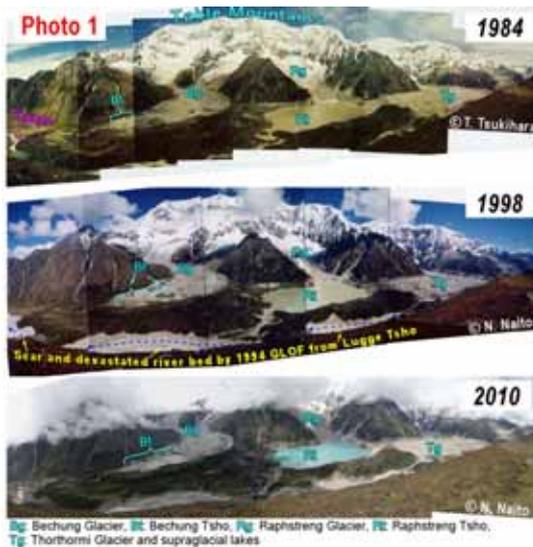
*The Survey, contains the responses of 7,142 Bhutanese and is nationally representative. * The survey findings don't provide details on what is classified under 'non-work', besides socio-cultural activities, prayer, and TV.*

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Bhutan's glaciers are shrinking

Bhutan has lost 22% of its glaciers in the last decade and glaciers in the Himalayas generally have shrunk by as much as a fifth in the last 30 years.

A recent report published by International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), provides the latest information on the status of climate change in the Hindu Kush Himalayan (HKH) region. It is the first comprehensive account of glacier cover in the region. The report titled 'The Status of Glaciers in the HKH Region' says the glaciers appear to be shrinking in both the central and eastern Himalayas. Country-specific studies have found that depletion of glacial area over the past 30 years was 22 percent in Bhutan.



Other more specific studies undertaken in Bhutan by a Bhutan-Japan joint research team has carried out field surveys repeatedly since 1998, and has stored up the scientific observational information on changes of not only glacial lakes but also glaciers. In addition, they have collected previous related records, including photographs taken for glacial lakes and glaciers in the past (shown opposite). In order to forecast the future of glacial lakes and glaciers, it is necessary to monitor their exact changes at present and in the past, and then, to understand the mechanism causing the changes. Without storage of such scientific knowledge, any countermeasure to prevent glacier disaster risk may not succeed. The HKH region, which is home to 30 percent of the world's glaciers, has more than 54,000 glaciers covering an area of 60,000 sq km. This number has been known for the first time through remote sensing mechanism. "This research provides a baseline to measure the potential impact of climate change in the region and develop options for mitigating the impact of dynamic changes the region is expecting in the coming years," said Basanta Shrestha

from ICIMOD. Increases in glacial melting are projected to limit the natural water storage provided by snow and ice, and it will increase the risk of glacial lake outburst floods. Mass losses from glaciers and accelerating reductions in snow cover are expected to ultimately reduce water supplies and hydropower potential, according to the report. The scientists have also predicted some changes in the seasonality of flows in river basins supplied by melt water from snow and ice. Droughts will most likely affect greater areas, and there will be a need for greater reliance on irrigation as water sources become more restricted. The risk of flooding will also increase with this impact of climate change.

The HKH region spreads over 4.2 million sq km in the eight countries of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan. The water from melting snow and ice feeds 10 large river systems and the river basins cover an area of about 9 million sq km, of which 2.8 million sq km lie within the HKH region. The region offers livelihood to 210 million people. And being rich in biodiversity, it is home to some 25,000 plant and animal species, and contains a larger diversity of forest types than the Amazon. David Molten, Director General of ICIMOD said, "Dealing with these changes will require increased regional cooperation between the governments and other actors in the eight countries in the HKH region and will represent the kind of cooperation needed to meet the challenges of climate change".

Youth unemployment - a growing issue

According to the 2011 Labour Force Survey, 1,800 unemployed people are class 12 students and 700 are graduates. After the class 12 results were declared last month, some 5,000 joined the job market that already has 10,500 unemployed people. By this calculation, there are today 18,600 unemployed people with class 10, 12, and degree mark sheets in the market. Youth unemployment is growing rapidly and is perhaps Bhutan's greatest challenge for the future.

The Labour Ministry recently announced 1,156 "training places leading to employment" slots in 11 Government training institutes, but this means that for one training slot there are nine class 10 students. They also announced 3,708 training opportunities in private training institutes and under the Ministry of Labour.

The Royal Institute of Health Sciences has also announced 90 seats for class 10 students to be trained as health assistants and medical technicians." While class 10 is the minimum qualification required, class 12 students take most of these seats," said the Institute's Director, Dr Chenchu Dorji.

Snow Leopard Survey

A preliminary survey conducted recently at the Wangchuck Centennial Park using camera traps revealed several footages of snow leopards and its prey. The study, worth Nu 2M, World Wildlife Fund officials said, would focus on the snow leopard population and their places of existence in order to help prioritise the best areas for conservation. He said their model survey showed that snow leopards, mainly found in Himalayan region, were gradually disappearing because of poaching and being killed when it came in conflict with humans. "In Bhutan, however, there's no pressure from poaching," the official said, but there exists this conflict with yak herders." From 2008-2010, Bhutan Foundation's



Tshewang Wangchuk conducted extensive snow leopard surveys across the country's mountains, from western Haa to Mela Pass on the Tibetan border as part of his PhD research. Non-invasive genetics and camera trap evidence, he said, confirmed that the Jigme Dorji National Park was a snow leopard stronghold for Bhutan. Impacts of climate change on snow leopards, Tshewang Wangchuk said was speculative at the moment for lack of actual data. "Other proximal threats such as changing human activities and human wildlife interactions are the immediate impacts," he said, adding it was important to bring benefits of conservation to local communities to ensure their support. Snow leopards are native to the mountain ranges of south and central Asia between 3,000 and 5,500 meters.

Parliament endorses Child Adoption Bill

Last month Parliament endorsed the Child Adoption Bill of Bhutan 2012 resulting in the country having for the first time a streamlined mechanism and procedures on child adoption.

One of the major changes to the Bill is that it is no longer necessary for an adoption application to be made by a married couple. A single person can now adopt a child because he or she could have the potential of being a better parent. An application for adoption of a child may be made by any Bhutanese citizen who is of good moral character, financially secure, not convicted of a crime, capable of support and care for the child and is at least 30 years of age. The age difference between the adoptive parent and the child adopted must be at least 15 years.

The right of the child to inherit the adopted parent's property was also discussed at length. While some suggested that the child should have the right notwithstanding anything contained in the Inheritance Act, it was, however, decided that the child will inherit the adopted parent's property in accordance with the law. The clause spelling out the adoption of Bhutanese children by foreign nationals also drew heated debates. Any foreign national may now adopt a Bhutanese child, unlike the original clause which insisted that only a foreign national of a country with whom Bhutan has diplomatic relations may adopt a Bhutanese child.

A new section was added to the Act, which states a Bhutanese national may adopt a foreign child, only if that person has resided in the country from which the child is to be adopted for more than three years, and can provide evidence that residing in that country was not for the purpose of adoption.

Buddhist Art Forum

11 April to 14 April 2012

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre, The Courtauld Institute of Art, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN

This Forum will be a major event of an exceptional kind, seeking to address the philosophical issues concerning Buddhism and art in a profound and holistic way. Drawing about 40 contributors from widely varied backgrounds from across the world, the Forum will have four overarching themes dealing with Buddhist art: definition; creation and function; conservation; and its role in the contemporary world. The Forum will include evening receptions jointly hosted with the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum, and another in The Courtauld Gallery.

Booking is for all 4 days of the Forum. Cost: £100 (£75 Courtauld staff/students and concessions).

BOOK ONLINE: <http://courtauld-institute.digitalmuseum.co.uk>. For payment by cheque, or for further information, email: ResearchForumEvents@courtauld.ac.uk.

Since places are limited, The Courtauld regrets that it cannot guarantee that all booking requests will be accepted. Organised by David Park and Kuenga Wangmo (The Courtauld Institute of Art)

Gold and Silver Awards for Bhutan

Every year The Times presents 'Destinations' - a Holiday and Travel Show, at London's Earls Court. This year it was in the first week of February, with all the major travel companies exhibiting. Wanderlust is a travel company that produces probably the premier travel magazine and in which its adventurous travelling clients are asked to vote on the 'best' in various categories - such as the best travel operator or the best travel website.



This year Bhutan received two awards. The first was a Gold award to Paro Airport in the Top Worldwide Airport category (jointly with Changi Airport in Singapore). "Good things often come in small packages and the success of Paro Airport proves the case", said Lyn Hughes, Editor-in-Chief of Wanderlust Magazine. "While certain other international airports offer a range of diversions to occupy passengers, and a feeling that you could be anywhere in the world, Paro scores highly by offering an attractive traditional-style building with a sense of place, a beautiful setting, and an efficient welcome." John Davey, our Vice Chairman, representing Michael Rutland, the Honorary Consul for Bhutan in the UK, was presented with the two awards by Lyn Hughes, at the Awards Ceremony held at the Exhibition. (photo below)



The Silver Award to Bhutan was in the Top Country category (second to Japan). "In an increasingly homogenised world, discerning travellers are seeking out authentic experiences more and more," said Lyn Hughes, Editor-in-Chief of Wanderlust Magazine. "Bhutan has always been popular with those Wanderlust readers who have been there, but the fact that it has scored so highly this year shows that it is clearly meeting - or even exceeding - expectations for cultural and adventurous experiences. Given that the number of readers visiting doubled last year, this is even more remarkable, showing it is truly offering a quality travel experience"

Many of the other winners were keen to congratulate Bhutan on scooping two prestigious awards at the same ceremony. A small reception was held after the presentations at which the 'winners' could meet and talk. These awards are an important part of the whole Travel Exhibition and the two certificates have been sent to Michael Rutland in Bhutan for presentation to the appropriate authorities.

COMMITTEE CHANGES

Chris Watt has taken over the role of Membership Secretary for the moment, in place of Elizabeth Lee. Elizabeth's contribution to the Society as Membership Secretary has been outstanding, and a fuller tribute will appear in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Michael Rutland, Chairman

NEWSLETTER SCHEDULE

During 2011 there will be three issues of the Society Newsletter at the end of February, June and September. Notices of any Society meetings not included in the Newsletter will be notified directly to members via e-mail. Please make sure that the Membership Secretary, Chris Watt, has your latest e-mail address. He can be contacted as shown on page 8.

Dung and destruction along southern foothills

Seasonal elephant-visitors from across the Indian border are spending more time in Bhutan, so concluded a recent study carried out in Samtse, Sarpang and Phipsoo wildlife sanctuary. From dung sample analysis, foresters estimate some 500 elephants migrate between May and October from the grasslands in India to the thick forests of southern Bhutan.

"Availability of food in the undisturbed sub-tropical forests and the vast expanse of the southern foothills have made these areas attractive to elephants," forestry officials said. However the presence of elephants has weighed heavily on farmers. In the last few years, reports of destruction of crops, property and threat to lives by wild elephants have increased in the southern districts, bringing many of the rural livelihoods into direct conflict with wildlife. Most affected have been crops such as maize, rice, millet, banana, and nut trees. Farmers have also complained of damage to cattle sheds and to cattle feed and even to stone walls surrounding their fields.



"So far, farmers have never been compensated for their losses caused by the elephants," said Chief Forestry Officer Sonam Wangchuk. As a mitigation

measure, solar electric fence worth about Nu 10M was erected along the southern borders "Besides being expensive, electric fencing has also proved to be ineffective due to poor maintenance and theft." Additional measures to reduce conflict now include equipping staff with guns for blank fire.

Tourism figures

Latest annual tourism figures for Bhutan show a significant increase in the number of United Kingdom visitors to the country in 2011 compared to 2010. A total of 37,481 international visitors entered Bhutan in 2011 representing a 38 per cent increase from the 27,196 in 2010. Of those 2,795 were British compared to 772 from the previous year – an increase of 1,023.

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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:

c.j.watt@gmail.com

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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