

THE BHUTAN SOCIETY NEWSLETTER



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PRESIDENT: SIR SIMON BOWES LYON

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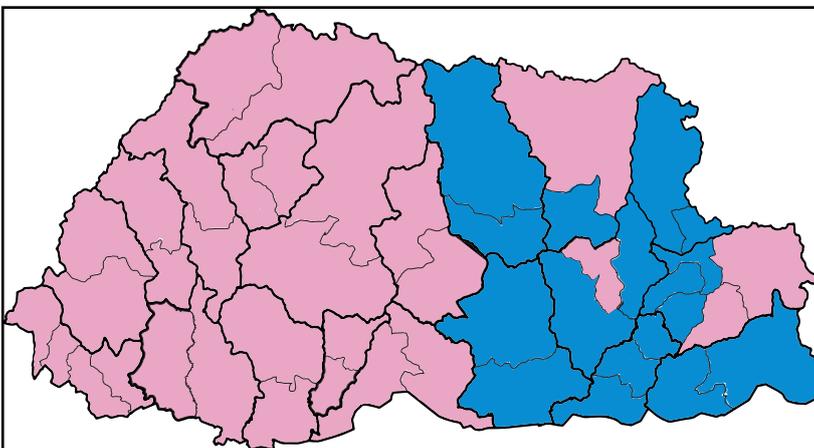
Bhutan votes for change

On October 18th 2018 the Bhutanese electorate voted in their third Parliamentary National Assembly Election. For the third time the Election was won by a different party.

Thirty of the forty-seven constituencies were won by the Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa (DNT) so it was duly elected as the ruling party for the next Government. The DNT is led by Dr Lotay Tshering who will now go on to be the Country's Prime Minister.

Druk Phensum Tshogpa (DPT), in winning the remaining seventeen constituencies, will now form the Opposition Party for the second time and its leader, Pema Gyamtsho, will be the Opposition Leader for the second time. The incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP) was defeated in the Primary Election in September, so did not participate in the Assembly Election, nor did the BKP (Bhutan Kuen-Nyam Party).

There were more than 860 polling stations across the country and voter turnout was high at 71.46 per cent. This is an increase of five percent compared to the Primary Elections held in September and significantly higher than in the last National Election in 2013. Most cast their votes in person but a third voted through a postal ballot. There is a clear split in the results with the DNT (pink) winning most of the seats in the West and Central Bhutan whilst the DPT (in blue) win the majority of seats in the East. *See page 6 for more information*



Final Reminder for the Annual Dinner 2018

The Annual Dinner will be held on Monday 26th November at the National Liberal Club, 1 Whitehall Place, London SW1A 2HE

For members who still wish to book, tickets are £65. The booking form was circulated with the last issue (No 65) or you can contact the Dinner Secretary, Elizabeth Jacobson, on tookiej@btinternet.com before the closing date, November 16th.

Members' Survey

Many thanks to all who completed this questionnaire. Your replies and comments will be an important part of the review being undertaken by the Committee over the coming months. We plan to include more details of the results of the questionnaire in the next issue.

Annual General Meeting

This meeting took place on 17th September at the Polish Hearth Club in London. A copy of the minutes is enclosed.

*The meeting was followed with a talk by Gerard Tardy and William Tacon, on the activities of The Loden Foundation Entrepreneurs Programme. The book about these projects, "**Made in Bhutan**", has now been published. See issue 64 for more details.*

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

**7pm Monday 4 February 2019 at The Polish Hearth Club,
55 Princes Terrace, Exhibition Road London SW7 2PN**

Wall Painting Conservation: The Courtauld Institute of Art's programme in Bhutan and elsewhere

Speakers: Sibylla Tringham and Karma Yeshey

Sibylla Tringham now heads the Courtauld's wall painting department and Karma is in his final year there, studying for his MA. The Courtauld has recently completed a conservation project at Tango monastery outside Thimphu. It is also running conservation and educational programmes in Nagaur Fort, Rajasthan and is about to start work at Longthorpe Tower, Peterborough.

Diary date to note

**Following the success of our first film evening, a second event is planned for
26 March 2019, again at The Polish Hearth Club in London. More details soon.**

Interested in visiting Highgrove?



The Royal Gardens at Highgrove are open to the public for guided tours on selected dates between April and October each year.

The Society is planning a group visit in early May - on or around May 9th 2019. Our group will be led by one of HRH The Prince of Wales's expert guides, on a two-hour tour through the extraordinary and inspiring Royal Gardens at Highgrove. The Gardens provide a unique insight into family life on the estate and the tour includes tales of how HRH has crafted each organic garden from scratch. The tour will include areas as diverse as the magnificent Thyme Walk, to the serene, otherworldly setting of the Stumpery.

During our visit we will also be able to browse the Highgrove Estate Shop where a wide range of unique artisan products and souvenirs are for sale. We can also enjoy a delicious lunch menu in the Orchard Restaurant, as well as tea, coffee, and a selection of light meals and cakes. To ensure that the group gets the most out of our visit, it is recommended that we pre-book lunch or tea

from their special discounted group menu, which is only available to coach parties of 16 people or more, ordering in advance.

The 2019 dates for the Garden tours are not released until February but, before we book, we need to register your interest in this proposed tour. At this stage it is planned to organise a private coach from London to Highgrove, but some members may also wish to arrive by car. Tickets for entry to The Royal Gardens are £25, lunch and coach transport will be extra. Once confirmed, members interested in this trip would be expected to commit and prepay. Please let Dorothea Friesen know by December 21st whether you are interested in this trip so that she can finalise the date and arrangements.

Contact her on dorotheafriesen@gmail.com .

NEWS

The Biennial Meeting of the European Bhutan Friendship Associations

Report by Andrew Sutton

Mid-summer 2018 saw the 10th gathering of the European Bhutan friendship associations. In recent years these have been held in alternate years. This meeting was brilliantly co-hosted by the Swiss and French societies - starting in impeccable Geneva and then moving to glorious Chamonix.

Fourteen associations with a total of some fifty representatives attended along with Bhutan's ambassadors from Brussels and Geneva, with their staffs. All began at the Red Cross Museum in Geneva with registration and the chance to visit the museum before welcome addresses and then presentations about the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. We learned that the Bhutan Red Cross Society's application to be the 191st National Society in the International Federation is being examined currently and this process could be completed by the spring of 2019.

The party then moved to Chamonix. Miraculously Geneva's late afternoon streets were all but empty as, knowing that the Pope was visiting that day, most residents had decided to work from home. That evening we were treated to a showing of a documentary film about Chamonix's development, nestled in a valley so close to Mont Blanc, in the last 250 years. The film had been made, by Jeanne Mascolo a member of Amis du Bhutan who also helped to organise the meeting, using many historic photographs and film. This film is shown regularly in Chamonix and, inter alia, recognises the affection the town has for the British whose keen mountain climbers began (and continue to be part of) the significant local tourism activity.

The following morning was the main business session of the meeting. It began with welcome addresses by Francoise Pommaret and Marianne Frei, presidents of the host associations, and by HE Aum Pema Choden, Bhutan's ambassador to Brussels. Each friendship association then had the stage to make a short report; Pema Choden also spoke for Spain and Finland. These reports showed a wide variety of activities both in Europe and in contacts with Bhutan. After lunch, hosted by the Mayor of Chamonix, there was a wide ranging open discussion with Pema Choden on topical matters. Then we had presentations on the theme of Tourism in Mountainous Areas with contributions by Aum Chhimmy Pem (Director of the Tourism Council of Bhutan), Professor Manu Broccard (Institute of Tourism, Sierre, Switzerland) and Messrs Prud'Homme and Durochat (both of the Chamonix Tourism Office). The afternoon session finished with a fascinating lecture on The Withdrawal of the Glaciers by glaciologist, M Luc Moreau.

This talk along with the film of the previous evening and the following morning's adventure to the Mer de Glace above Chamonix at Montanvers, showed clearly how glaciers have melted and retreated in recent times. Major glaciers which only a century or so ago had reached the valley floor are now much smaller and end well up the slopes above.

The final formal event was the opening of an exhibition of photographs of Bhutan in downtown Chamonix followed by an al fresco reception with (outstanding) momos and other dishes brought from Geneva by HE Mr Kinga Singye and his team and a wonderful spread of Italian fare.

The meeting was blessed with extraordinarily pleasant weather, fine mountain views, brilliant organisation and support, fine food and excellent company. Congratulations to all those responsible in the Swiss and French societies!

The Bhutan Society of the United Kingdom was represented by Michael Rutland, Andrew Sutton, Dorothea Friesen and Elizabeth Jacobson

Public health challenges

The United Nations - the world's biggest intergovernmental organisation- is tasked with promoting global co-operation and supporting measures to address challenging public health issues. Two of its current concerns are tuberculosis (TB) and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

In Bhutan, NCDs have become the biggest health challenge in recent years. More than five percent of all deaths in the country is attributed to NCDs. The World Bank's Bhutan NCD policy brief estimates that by 2025, the proportion of the ageing population (65 years and above) will increase from 4.4 to 7.3 percent. The prevalence of NCDs could so rise putting pressure on the country's healthcare cost significantly in the coming years. Health officials say that referral cases and costs, mostly for advanced NCDs, have been doubling over the years. This means that, as economic growth and modernisation continue to open many doors for the spread of different, but often unhealthy, lifestyles, sustaining free basic healthcare systems are considered to be a major challenge.

The Health Ministry has proposed that 53 percent of the finance and materials to address non-communicable diseases (NCDs) would be at the district level in the 12th Plan, which is welcomed. Alongside this, experts consider it will be essential for early detection, screening, and treatment systems to be developed, and greater support and training of health professionals need to be in place. However plans and practice may not yet line up e.g. there is a target to reduce harmful use of alcohol by 10 percent by 2025, yet the number of alcohol manufacturing plants in the country has been increasing year by year. Some serious challenges face the new Government.

More coordination and communication for tourism in Bhutan

To help create a common forum for all tourism sector agencies in Bhutan, Bhutan Sustainable Tourism Society (BSTS) was launched recently in Thimphu .

The forum was the idea of Dr Karma Tshering an eco-tourism specialist. He said, "Bhutan is almost a picture-perfect travel destination for many. It is in our hands to either nurture it to get continuous benefits - or exploit it only for short-term benefits." He said the dynamics of tourism development were changing in Bhutan due to the rapid increase in the numbers and consequently the pathway to sustainability needed realignment. "We cannot be complacent anymore. The time has come for us to become more proactive." Besides the relevant government agencies, he said that other tourism sector associates like the Association of Bhutanese Tour Operators, Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan and donor partners, have been putting in their efforts to support responsible tourism growth in Bhutan.

"In spite of this, the biggest gap recognised in tourism development is the lack of coordination between these agencies," he said. "Tourism is multi-sectoral and working in isolation is a potential threat." This is where he believes the existence of BSTS comes in to interpret, strengthen coordination and foster partnerships - "to bring all the players together under one roof." One of the objectives for establishing BSTS is to encourage and support tourism research and the forum would upload all researches on Bhutan tourism.

The Society also aims to be a think tank to provide informed decision to the Government. Gross National Happiness Commission's Secretary, Thinley Namgyel, said that tourism was identified as one of the key sectors in the 12th Plan with the emphasis now being on coordination, collaboration and consolidation.

The Society would be a voluntary organisation with free membership open to all interested individuals and organisations.

The Tourism Council of Bhutan (TCB) has also launched an online portal to share tourism information such as photographs, video clips, informational publications and other promotional collaterals to make it easier for partners to promote Bhutan from any part of the world.

The address is <http://drive.tourism.gov.bt>

KINGDOM OF BHUTAN

Preserving unique identities of Laya

More than twenty youth volunteers and teachers in Laya Central School have come together to revive skills and interest in making local and traditional items, including its unique conical hat called a Belo, and the traditional black skirt woven from yak wool called a Zum.



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The teacher, Gyem Tshering, who coordinates the project, said if traditional crafts and textiles were not revived, there was a high chance of losing these unique identities. “When we talk about Laya, the first thing that comes to our mind is the unique hat they wear. We aim to make these identities sustainable,” he said.

Laya Gup Lhakpa Tshering said the initiative, if successful, would help sustain age-old customs and traditions. “These ancient

practices are nearing extinction,” he said. “The younger generation should be encouraged to preserve our culture and explore opportunities in it.” Wearing the cone shaped hat has become rare over the years and is worn now mainly by the local elderly. It is believed that only two of the two hundred and fifty households in Laya can still weave the hat, so it has not been easy to find local trainers.

Today there are thirteen students learning how to weave the local hat, seven are learning how to weave the local skirt and seven are learning how to make souvenirs out of local fabrics. Tenzin, another local trainer said that students are enthusiastic to learn. He earns at least Nu 1,600 per day weaving the hat and can complete weaving three hats in a day. Laya School is one of the most visited places by the tourist and trekkers. The project aims to sell the products to the visitors and participate in local exhibitions and festivals. The initiative is supported by UNICEF and Youth Development Fund.

Five little fishes

Five new species of the catfish group have been identified in Bhutan through a study directed by Dr DB Gurung, Professor at the College of Natural Resources.

He said that to celebrate Bhutan’s commitment to nature conservation and sustainable development, the first of the new species *Parachiloglanis Drukyulensis* was named in honour of Bhutan, also known as Drukyul, the original name for Bhutan.

The second of the new species, *Parachiloglanis Benjii*, was named to honour Dasho Paljor Jigme Dorji popularly known as Dasho Benji for his contribution to nature protection. The third was named *Parachiloglanis Dangmechhuensis*, after Dangmechhu, as this species is mostly confined to Dangmechhu river and its tributaries. The fourth, *Exostoma Mangdechhuensis* was named after Mangdechhu where the species is distributed in its natural habitat.

Dr Gurung said that the fifth and final new species, *Creteuchiloglanis Bumdelingensis*, was named after Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary, another hub of biological diversity. He said that due to a long peer review process that required approval by scientists working outside Bhutan, the study that began in 2013 could only be completed this year.

The Election - Behind the scenes

It is clear with such a good voter turnout that Democracy has firmly taken root in Bhutan. However, the logistics of conducting an election in such diverse surroundings has not been an easy affair and some interesting stories are now beginning to emerge.

To get presiding, security officials and voting machinery to Lunana necessitated the Gasa dzongkhag administration making three trips by helicopter. It is officially an eight day walk from the headquarters, and with uncertain winter weather, polling officials also set off a week in advance of polling day to ensure they were there on time. In Bumthang, officials walked at least three days to reach the more remote highland areas where some locals had never been able to vote in previous elections. Heavy rainfall also left some officials stranded. In order to reach their respective polling stations on time, they had to take a ride in an army truck then in a JCB earth moving bucket to cross the swollen river!

With poor connectivity also a problem in some areas, polling officials had to walk to a nearby hilltop to relay two hourly voter turnout reports whilst others had to keep their mobiles switched off to save battery as remote polling stations rarely had any electricity. Buses were also hired to ferry voters in areas where no public transport facilities existed.

Free Wi-Fi at the Airport

To facilitate passengers who were travelling, Bhutan Telecom (BT) has begun providing free Wi-Fi at the departure terminal building at the Airport.

Director at Department of Aviation and Transport, Karma Wangchuk said that this service was enabled for all users. "These services are one of the key components in running an international airport and are now considered a necessity."

There are about 10 charging points and four USB cable connections. One access point could handle a maximum of about 300 passengers and there are four access points. Users will be limited to one hour of usage.

Thimphu's construction boom and impact

During 2012-2014 ongoing construction projects were frozen and loans were not available for the housing and construction sector. However, Bhutan is now experiencing a big construction boom and most of this is in Thimphu where there is a strong demand for apartments, both for purchase and for rent, office space, shops and hotels.

An official from the Bank of Bhutan (BoB) said, "Prices are on the rise because demand currently outpaces supply. The construction industry is slow to react to increases in demand because it takes a long time to build a house, and, in highly developed areas, there simply isn't any more land on which to build."



However these activities are not without their consequences. The demand for water supply during this boom is increasing and with the existing trend of water shortage and crisis in some parts of Thimphu, it is becoming a serious problem.

In anticipation of serious water issues in the city centre, the Thromde is currently constructing two new water treatment plants and has come up with a plan to supply water from a third which should help improve the overall water situation.

Alongside the need for additional water supplies is the need to deal with increased sewerage, so the Thromde is also working to extend and increase the current sewerage network and coverage. A major project involves the construction of a new decentralised treatment plant, but the plans keep needing revision as the number of houses and people in Thimphu keeps increasing. In the meantime much remains to be done in terms of operation and maintenance and also to tackle the overflow of septic tanks in some areas of the city.

To add to these challenges there is also the problem of dealing with the increased amounts of dumped construction waste. Whilst environmental health officials visit sites and speak with both the owners and labourers, their advice is often ignored. If they are caught, fines will be imposed on the owners with likely consequent cuts in labourers' pay. Even though areas have been identified for dumping soil, these are filling up quickly and soil is often dumped by or below the roadside. New sites for soil dumping are now being sought.

NEWS AND UPDATES

International Society of Bhutan Studies (ISBS) Launch Conference to be held at Magdalen College, Oxford on 8-10 January 2019

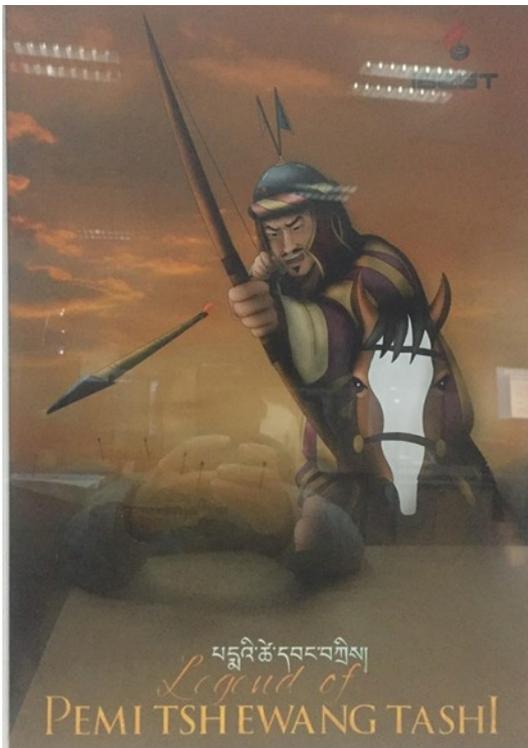
The ISBS seeks to develop the study of Bhutanese culture, life and nature in all aspects and to encourage, inspire and motivate interest in its lesser known aspects and to promote and strengthen the areas of existing concentration. It exists primarily to encourage academic exchange among Bhutanese and foreign scholars.

This conference will involve Bhutanese scholars presenting their work on behalf of the Royal University of Bhutan. It will also involve senior Bhutanese and foreign participants in plenary discussions, including a keynote presentation from Dasho Karma Ura, President of the Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH. There will also be presentations on Bhutanese ecology, law, politics, anthropology, art, linguistics and religion by academics from institutions including the Royal University of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck School of Law, Centre for Himalayan Environment and Development Studies, University of Oxford and UNESCO.

The event is co-hosted by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) at the University of Oxford and Centre for Bhutan Studies and GNH Research, Bhutan.

For further information and to register, please visit: www.isbsbhutan.org/isbs-launch-conference

The Legend of Pemi Tshewang Tashi



This project, of the Loden entrepreneur Tharchen and his IBest team, takes Bhutanese cinematography to a whole new level. Combining creativity and culture, innovation and history, art and entertainment, the film brings one of the most celebrated Bhutanese stories to the big screen in the form of a beautifully crafted animation. Bhutan's history is filled with stories of heroism, tragedy, deception, betrayal and such other themes which make great subjects for films. Yet, the constraints on resources and skills have hindered filmmakers from enacting historical scenes. Tharchen and a large team of animation artists have managed to overcome this challenge and present to us a much loved story with impressive visuals and good dialogues.

The ballad of Pemi Tshewang Tashi, the chamberlain of Wangdue Dzongpon who made his fateful journey to fight the troops of Jakar Penlop Pema Tenzin in the nineteenth century, is known to most Bhutanese. In this film Bhutanese, both young and old will enjoy a

familiar story and when subtitles are added, it will also draw much international attention.

The same group of young Bhutanese artists has also brought out an illustrated comic using this legendary tale. To promote art and reading culture in the country, the team will donate five per cent of the comic sales to VAST Bhutan and READ Bhutan.

Recycling - Bhutan style!

Tackling the huge amount of dry waste produced in Thimphu has been a challenge, but the Thromde, along with other relevant stakeholders, have initiated a segregation, waste reduction and an innovative recycling programme. With the waste recovery centre fully functional, dry waste can be reduced by about 75%. Papers are compacted and recycled into egg trays whilst PET bottles are compacted and sold to India.

One of the more creative plastic recycling projects is Green Road's initiative of reusing hard plastics to make different products such as fencing poles, flower pots, saucers and land demarcation pegs. Revenue and Customs records show that around twenty million Nu's worth of flowerpots are imported to Bhutan annually and, unofficially, the figure is probably much higher.

The founder of Green Road, Rikesh Gurung, added that unlike the imported hard plastic products, the reused plastic products can be repaired if they break. The initiative uses about 3.5 kg of hard plastic to produce a 120 cm by 5 cm fencing pole, between 5 g and 500 g to produce different sizes of flower pots and about 5 to 6 kg of hard plastic to produce a flag pole. He said that Green Road also uses soft plastics such as carrier bags, plastic chips and other wrappers for the construction of roads.

Meanwhile glass bottles, except for beer bottles, do not have any market value and end up in landfill. Clean Bhutan, a Civil Society

Organization, will soon be starting a project to collect glass bottles and mould them into new and artistic shapes. Nedup Tshering, Chief Executive Officer of Clean Bhutan said, "There are no dealers willing to take glass containers such as wine and whisky bottles for recycling." He said that the Organization will employ people to mould and design glass sculptures from the bottles through a glass blowing process. Glass blowing experts from Japan are being invited to Bhutan for a couple of months to help with the training. It is then planned to establish glass blowing units, initially in two or three dzongkhags.

Clean Bhutan has already initiated a programme to reuse empty tetra-paks to weave baskets and dustbins by applying the traditional bamboo weaving techniques, and it is hoped they will soon be available on the market.

CONTACT LIST

Vice President	Michael Rutland OBE British Honorary Consulate PO Box 1044 Thimphu Bhutan 13A, Pewley Hill, Guildford GU1 3SN T: +975 1761 8553 <i>rutland.michael@gmail.com</i>
Chairman	Andrew Sutton West Walls, Cotmandene Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2BL T: 01306 884349 <i>andrewsutton001@aol.com</i>
Secretary	David Glazebrook <i>davidglazebrook@outlook.com</i>
Treasurer	Dorji Wangchuk <i>dorji.wangchuk@outlook.com</i>
Membership	Rosie Glazebrook <i>rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com</i>
Newsletter Editor	Sylvia Robert-Sargeant <i>editor@bhutansociety.org</i>
Dinner /Films Secretary	Elizabeth Jacobson <i>tookiej@btinternet.com</i>
Excursions Organiser	Dorothea von Friesen <i>dorotheafriesen@gmail.com</i>
Website Coordinator	Lucy Hornberger <i>website@bhutansociety.org</i>
Events Group Secretary	Nicholas Thompson <i>n.thompson@rediffmail.com</i>
Enquiries	<i>info@bhutansociety.org</i>
Website	<i>www.bhutansociety.org</i>

NOTE

*If you have not done so already, please send your e-mail address to ***rosieglazebrook@hotmail.com*** who will add it to the database.*

There is no plan to go paperless, but it is often convenient to communicate information electronically at short notice.