

**Address by HE Prime Minister of Bhutan at
conference and celebration on the Birth Anniversary
of Guru Rinpoche in Paro Rinpung Dzong**

As all of you are aware, the birth anniversary of Guru Padsambhava is being celebrated in dzongs, monasteries, hermitages and village temples throughout the country. People from all walks of life in our country observe this holy day. His Revered Majesty has been gracious enough to travel far to the east, and commemorate this extraordinary occasion with the people of eastern Bhutan, by being in Takila. His Holiness the Je Khenpo is likewise leading prayer ceremonies, with the Sangha of Central Monastic Body, in Thimphu, the capital city.

For the people in the Himalayas, who revere and worship Guru Rinpoche, it is believed that Guru Rinpoche will manifest for the sake of peace and happiness of all sentient beings and his presence will be felt in our hearts on this day. On this most holy day, food, fruits and flowers along with heartfelt prayers are offered in all the holy sites of Guru in Bhutan as well as all over the South Asian region associated with Guru. In Bhutan, festivals and dances are held in numerous places in his honour.

Here in Paro Dzong, the public of Paro Barkor Tshodruk and many distinguished guests from South Asian region have gathered to pay homage to Guru collectively. I am particularly pleased that the Rabdey and Dzongkhag Administration of Paro have created an excellent opportunity to celebrate it by unveiling the giant 110 feet silk-scroll of Guru, or Guru Thongdroel, with the gracious permission of His Revered Majesty.

Close to the middle of the eighth century, Bhutan was blessed to receive repeated visits and stays of Guru Rinpoche. It was an independent nation called Monyul even at that time. From Singye Dzong, Gomphu Kora, and Omkar Drag in the East; Nabji in Tongsa and Kurjey in Bumthang in the centre; Paro Takstsang in the West, Bhutan has been blessed by him with numerous holy sites where he meditated, and gave teachings to guide the people of that time as well as the future

generations thereafter towards higher values and principles of enlightenment. Since he set foot 1,270 years ago in our country and blessed it, people in this Hidden Land or the Medicinal Land have largely enjoyed happiness and peace, and lived in harmony with nature. Ever since Guru's visits, environmental preservation was carried out in and around the sacred places associated with Guru Rinpoche. The values of environmental conservation for the long-term welfare of all sentient beings have resulted from the Buddhist teachings that Guru Rinpoche brought to this part of the region.

Owing to Guru Padmasambhava's powerful blessings and prophecy, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel founded our nation. The unification by Zhabdrung was in accordance with the prophecy of Guru. Later, the emergence of Gongsa Ugyen Wangchuck as the first king of Bhutan was also in accordance with prophecy of Guru, to fulfil the need of time.

Guru Rinpoche is a celebrated and revered figure in many part of South Asia, including Bhutan. In fact, Guru Rinpoche's presence and impact stretches from the Hindu Kush to Eastern Himalayan region. He is one of the earliest figures who had traversed widely, Swat in Pakistan, Himachal, Nepal, Sikkim, Tawang, Bengal, Assam, Bangladesh, Odisha, Bhutan and Tibet carrying the light of Buddhist teachings, especially Vajrayana teachings. The legacy of shared spirituality of Buddhism in the region owes to Guru and those who followed his footsteps. Guru Rinpoche is revered as the Second Buddha in accordance with the prophecy of Lord Buddha. The teachings of Guru Rinpoche on international peace and harmony among people of different countries, and the cultivation of inner peace, and mind-body balance, have become extraordinarily relevant not only in the region but throughout the world.

I am very happy to note that in this special anniversary of Guru's birthday, coinciding with the birth of HRH the Gyalsey Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck, and 400th Anniversary year of the arrival of Zhabdrung to start unification of Bhutan into a larger State, South Asian conference on Guru Rinpoche is

being convened in Paro.

Guru Rinpoche's birth anniversary is another opportunity for the region to come together by recognising and enhancing the shared cultural processes centred on Guru. It is certainly befitting that for the first time, scholars, spiritual leaders and media from the South Asian region have gathered in Paro to underscore the Precious Guru's regional heritage. Cultural forms and expressions have developed over the millennia due to the manifold impact of Guru Rinpoche. The common and ancient spiritual heritage stemming from Guru Rinpoche is a vibrant strand of the unity in the region. Scholars, media, and spiritual leaders from South Asia need to strengthen scholastic understanding on the importance of Guru Rinpoche through greater research and archaeology.

I am particularly pleased to welcome the participants of the conference from all parts of South Asia to Paro. Paro Taktshang (Tiger Nest) is one of the most prominent places in the world associated directly with Guru Rinpoche and his consorts, Yogini Yeshey Tshogyal and Guru's Bhutanese consort, Yogini Monmo Tashi Chidren. I would like to express my appreciation to the Centre for Escalation of peace (CEP), Delhi and the Centre for Bhutan Studies for organising this innovative conference.

In conclusion, I take great pleasure in being able to join all of you to offer my deepest prayers to Guru Rinpoche for peace and harmony in the region. May the blessings of Guru Rinpoche and Bodhisattvas continue to be showered throughout the world, benefiting all sentient beings. May the merits of honouring his birth anniversary be dedicated to alleviation of sufferings of all sentient beings.

Tashi Deleg.