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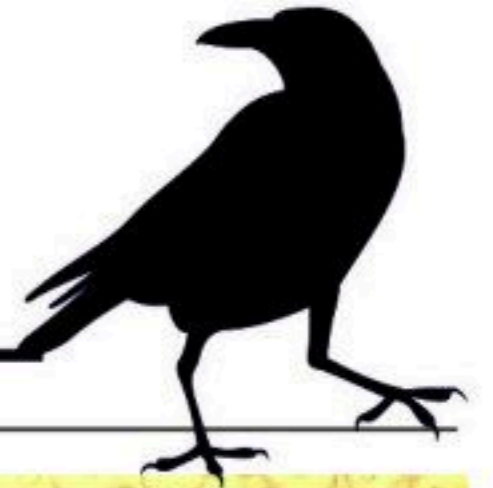
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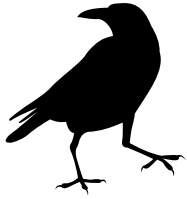
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The Raven

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MAY THE BEST PARTY WIN



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir/Madam,

Difficult but excellent work your team is doing for *The Raven*.

Trisha Nicholson.

I have always been an avid reader of your magazine ever since it hit the news-stands. Each issue of *The Raven* has been thought provoking. But of all the stories that you have published, I really enjoyed the one on special needs in your last edition. It was well researched, well written and a much needed article. I am saying this because I too have a child who goes to a special school in Thimphu. Please continue to carry such human interest stories every month.

Nima Dhendup, Thimphu.

As a regular reader of *The Raven*, I offer my congratulations to the editorial team for doing an excellent job so far. The only hitch lies in the resolution of some of the photographs carried with the stories. I am confident your team will not overlook that, but rectify it.

Keep up the good work.

Tashi Tobgay, Phuentsholing.

Email: t_tob@yahoo.com



Letters to the Editor or to *The Raven* will be edited for clarity and space and can be published, unless specifically asked not to.

I noticed a dip in the advertisements in your last issue. This has got me wondering if *The Raven* can continue sustaining itself each month and for how long. I look forward to the magazine because it brings out a lot of issues we otherwise tend to overlook. As I offer my good wishes to the team, I pray that you will not fold like the first monthly magazine that we had gotten so accustomed to. Please remember, you have a loyal readership and therefore please do all you can to stay afloat.

Chimmi Penjore, Thimphu.

NOTIFICATION FROM *THE RAVEN*

Starting April, *The Raven* will be going bi-monthly (publishing one issue every two months)

To our clients who have paid for annual subscriptions, your subscription will not run out at the end of 2013, but after all 12 issues you have paid for have been delivered to you.

We have made the decision to go bi-monthly owing to the nature of the articles that we publish. *The Raven* focuses on providing in-depth articles on burning social issues of our times. We have thus determined that our mission is best served when we have the time that allows us to meet the quality standards we want to achieve. The challenges of publishing within Bhutan have been immense and we hope that you will continue to provide us your goodwill and support.

Thank you for your understanding.

Sincerely,

Team Raven

CORRIGENDUM

In the last issue of *The Raven*/ Issue 5, Volume 1, the byline for *An Ode to My King* was unintentionally left out. We regret the inconvenience caused to the writer, Jurmi Chhowing, and to our readers.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

KUZUZANGPO!

Hope everyone had a “Happy” month in March and not just one Happy day (March 20 was declared the International Day of Happiness by the UN.) The observation of that day didn’t turn out to be unnecessary and frivolous as some thought it would. Social Media saw reflections on what “Happiness” meant to people, and how appreciative they were of things that made them happy. Surprisingly, even on the Bhutanese front, where many cynics on “Happiness” abound, negativity was largely suspended and replaced with cheerful greetings instead. Bhutan’s soft power – GNH – has certainly gone global, and it is all thanks to His Majesty the Fourth King who gave birth to this noble development philosophy. His Majesty the Fifth King of Bhutan, meanwhile, continues to keep this philosophy alive and others like the Prime Minister have carried the message far and wide. Now that it has officially gone global, it is important that we bring the focus of “Happiness” back to our own boundaries, and build on the creation of a country that we aspire for.

Election time is upon us. We are headed to the polls like we did five years ago! This time, however, people seem to be clearer about what they are looking for, but what may be in question is whether they will find the right candidates who embody their ideals. Political parties are having difficulty finding the right people. Many of the candidates appear wet behind the ears. Unless some rules/laws on requirements for candidates changes, the parties, and more importantly the country, will suffer from getting the right people in parliament. In this issue The Raven talks to the Election Commissioner about this. Current requirements that candidates have a college degree or resign from government service before campaigning, place too high a barrier to a broad, all inclusive democracy.

On a lighter note Bhutan saw record snowfalls this winter, but hopefully that is behind now. Spring is here, and so are the elections! It is time for new beginnings - new life, new inspiration, and renewing ourselves at the same time. Every day, or season, is an opportunity to do so, but there is something about spring. It brings with it – through the budding leaves and flowers, and the new life forms – a fresh wave of optimism.

Never cut a tree down in the wintertime. Never make a negative decision in the low time. Never make your most important decisions when you are in your worst moods. Wait. Be patient. The storm will pass and spring will come - Robert H. Schuller.

Sonam Ongmo
Editor-at-Large



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WRITE TO US



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Karma Singye Dorji is the author of 'Dreaming of Prayer Flags: Stories & Images from Bhutan.'



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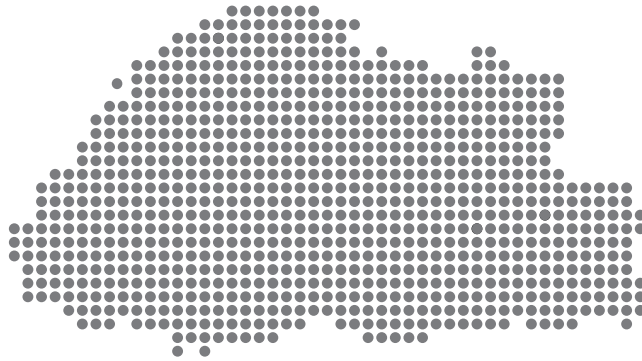
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THIMPHU

International Day of Happiness observed

The people in the capital, Thimphu, observed the International Day of Happiness with the unfurling of the giant Guru Thongdrel at the courtyard of Tashichhodzong. The Norzin Lam remained closed to traffic. Instead, various cultural programmes were showcased along the street. Food stalls were opened at Changlingmithang parking area and along the Norzin lam stretch. Free medical check-ups were also made available in different areas.

BUMTHANG

Birds strike Drukair

A Drukair flight approaching Bathpalathang airport in Bumthang suffered a bird strike on March 19. The flight returned safely to Paro airport, where the 48-seater twin turbo-propeller ATR was examined, and no major damage was found to have occurred to the aircraft. There were four passengers on board the flight to Bumthang.

SAMTSE

Man killed by lightning

A lightning strike killed a 35-year-old man on the spot and left another man unconscious for half an hour in Dungtoe gewog in Samtse on the evening of March 16. The deceased had gone to the pasture land in Dungtoe with his cattle and horses, a usual practice during winter. Around 3pm he had gone to his neighbour's place and lightning first struck a tree and then struck him while they were drinking tea in the kitchen. The man's body, along with his clothes, had completely burnt.

TRASHIGANG

DPT supporters file petition

A group of people led by the Druk Phuensum Tshogpa coordinators in Trashigang has filed a petition letter to the Chief Justice against the Gyalpoizhing Land case verdict passed by the Mongar District Court, recently. According to the group, people in Trashigang are confused and worried about the verdict passed on to two of their representatives, the Speaker and the Home Minister. They want the Supreme Court or the government to revoke the court's verdict, so that the two ministers can represent them for the second parliamentary election.

PARO

Fuel station narrowly escapes a fire disaster

A fire disaster was averted on March 11 at the Bhutan Oil Distributors fuel depot in Paro. Timely action of the police and the fire department prevented the accident, which could have otherwise, led to many casualties and destruction of property. The incident occurred at around 10.30 am when petrol was being transferred from a fuel tanker into the underground storage. Witnesses said the fire occurred due to a short circuit.

MANAS

Manas named world's hotspot for wild felids

Golden cats, marbled cats, leopards, clouded leopards, common leopards and tigers were caught on 60 camera traps. The Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) covering 1,057sqkm has been named the world's hotspot for wild felids. The presence of six species of wild felids and 28 other species of terrestrial mammals were confirmed through camera traps in the park's 74sqkm area.

The Raven



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quotes



As we approach the elections of 2013, we must keep in mind the foundations of our Nation and prevent all ethnic, religious or political divisions. We must participate in democracy with the spirit of harmony and fraternity.

If we did not consult and did not respect views and opinions of the people, we have no business even thinking about participating in the next round of elections.



If PDP comes to power, our first priority, like that of any other party that comes to power, would be to undo the damages done by DPT.



Because the captain doesn't abandon his ship, I have to take the council until the last day.



If election commission officials feel that we have to forego our benefits to re-contest, I think we don't have a choice.



HIS MAJESTY THE KING

in His address to the Nation at the 105th National Day Celebrations.



PRIME MINISTER JIGMI Y. THINLEY

to Bhutanese journalists at the monthly meet the press.



OPPOSITION LEADER TSHERING TOBGAY

in an interview with local media.



NC CHAIRPERSON NAMGAY PENJORE

in an interview with local media.



SANGAY KHANDU, NC CANDIDATE FROM GASA

declaring his intent to re-contest for another term.



On women & politics

Of the 67 nominees contesting the NC elections, only six are women.

Namgay Zam on twitter

On Fools day

The earliest recorded association between April 1 and foolishness can be found in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1392).

Tashi Dorji on twitter.

On GNH

The way to self reliance is not GNH but GDP!

Drukchirwangtshogpa on twitter.

On Budget

On one hand we talk of fund shortage and on the other hand we have an issue of fund surrender across 10 ministries and 20 Dzongkhags.

Lekey Wangdi on twitter

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ELECTIONS

2ND NATIONAL COUNCIL ELECTION

- ◉ APRIL 23
- ◉ NATIONWIDE

About 387,733 voters are expected to exercise their franchise to vote in the second National Council election. The upper house will be reconstituted when its term expires on April 28, 2013. 25 candidates will be elected to represent the people across the nation.

TV SHOWS

ZHIDHEYI TSAWA

- ◉ APRIL
- ◉ BBS 2

Brought to you by the Bhutan National Legal Institute, Zhidheyi Tsawa centres around five different families exploring a wide range of legal issues confronting Bhutanese citizens in their daily lives. The series will be launched on BBS Channel 2.

SPORTS

NATIONAL BASKETBALL LEAGUE

- ◉ APRIL 16
- ◉ SWIMMING POOL COMPLEX

After having finished with the league round on April 16, only six teams out of 12 will be entering playoffs. The winner of the league will be representing Bhutan in the South Asian Basketball Club Championship.

6TH NATIONAL BODYBUILDING CHAMPIONSHIP

- ◉ APRIL 20
- ◉ YDF HALL, THIMPHU

Organized by the Bhutan Bodybuilding Federation, this championship gathers all the bodybuilders and bodybuilding enthusiasts from around the country to one platform. The title of Mr. Bhutan will also be awarded to the winner.

FESTIVAL

URA YAKCHOE

- ◉ APRIL 21-25
- ◉ URA LHAKHANG, BUMTHANG

Though it is an idyllic village festival in Bumthang, it has generated tremendous publicity among tourists. And therefore, it is not only prestigious but also a matter of pride for the people of Ura.

INTERNATIONAL DAY

WORLD HEALTH DAY

- ◉ APRIL 7
- ◉ NATIONWIDE

World health day is observed to mark the anniversary of the founding of WHO in 1948. The theme for 2013 is high blood pressure.

MEET THE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

AS A LOT OF PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE THREE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES STAND FOR, AND WHAT THEY HAVE TO OFFER, *THE RAVEN* CAUGHT UP WITH THEM AND POSED A VARIETY OF QUESTIONS ON ISSUES PERTAINING TO THE BHUTANESE PUBLIC. THIS IS WHAT THEY HAD TO SAY:



How would you define your party?

BKP: Concerned by the rapid growth in the inequality amongst Bhutanese citizens and the rapid erosion in the age-old values of care, compassion, honesty, integrity, harmony, and community service, BKP is a group of conscious citizens who have come together to serve the nation by providing the Bhutanese people with an alternative political party.

DCT: DCT is a party formed by a group of committed people from humble, hardworking backgrounds - motivated by the collective vision to bring about positive change in the country. We believe we can truly achieve equitable socio-economic development, unity, prosperity, and happiness with the right leadership, vision and political will accompanied by bold ideas to launch fundamental changes in the way our country functions.

We believe our nation will move forward only when our citizens are empowered. Our nation will truly prosper when all of us are equal, when there is social justice, no disparity between the rich and the poor and when the government is accountable.

Our vision is to create a society that thrives on equality, justice and freedom. Democracy can sustain only when civil rights are protected, when people have bigger role in the

decision-making process, and when our youth, women and common people are a part and parcel of our development story. Citizens' interest is the central theme of our objective.

DNT: We are social democrats - believing in the principles of justice, freedom and solidarity. We believe that we need to build strong political institutions that are founded on strong ideologies and that we must provide an alternative choice for the people. No Bhutanese should be left behind as we progress on the path of development.

Is your party Left, Right or Centre, in terms of its standing? What is your party's ideology?


BKP: BKP follows a centre-left ideology.

DCT: DCT's philosophy and political ideology is based on the wisdom, principles and values of social democracy. We believe in liberty, equality, justice and solidarity. We believe in strengthening democracy by upholding the sanctity of the Constitution, protecting civil rights, and ensuring a just, united, prosperous and harmonious society.

We have consciously embraced this political ideology since it truly represents our beliefs and political philosophy. Our approach to development is people-centric with citizens'

interest as the central theme of our objective.

DNT: We are center left in keeping with our political ideology of social democracy.

 **What would be the core focus of your manifesto? Is it ready?**

BKP: BKP's manifesto projects around five elements as illustrated by the party election symbol. We will champion providing equal opportunities, maximum employment, equitable socio-economic development and people empowerment. Institutional reforms to ensure good governance are also in the top agenda. The manifesto will be improved daily with wider stakeholder consultations.

DCT: The draft manifesto is already in place and currently we are in the process of fine-tuning it. Earlier we had come up with a 25-point action plan, which we have condensed to 12 broad areas that include: i) creating a vibrant and caring democracy, ii) creating a strong, self-reliant economy, iii) rural prosperity, iv) building a vibrant, harmonious society, v) empowering our women, vi) Investing in youth, our future, vii) making education better and relevant, viii) promoting healthier citizens, ix) promotion and preservation of tradition and culture, x) a green vision for Bhutan, xi) investing in research and innovation, and xii) strengthening Bhutan's foreign relations.

We are confident that all these will ensure holistic growth and development, promote wellbeing and address multifaceted issues faced by our people.


DNT: The manifesto is currently being developed and is in the final stages of completion. As we have said in the past, we are proposing a seven point contract with the people of Bhutan, that focuses on strengthening democracy, rebuilding our economy, narrowing the gap, providing social protection, educating for global competence, committing quality public services and addressing youth issues as the future of our country.

 **How many candidates have you confirmed as of today?**

BKP: As of now, BKP has 42 confirmed candidates.

DCT: We have 41 confirmed candidates - 22 have been declared and the remaining will be declared shortly.

DNT: We have all 47 candidates and they are presently doing their introductory rounds in their respective constituencies

 **If your party does form the government, what would be**


your guiding principle and what would be your first and foremost task?

BKP: BKP will ensure socio-economic self-reliance, sovereignty, and security of our nation state. This is a precondition for the fulfillment of all the hopes and aspirations we may hold for the future of our nation and of our children. Our first task will be to align the 11th FYP with the party manifesto.

DCT: Given the mandate to form the government, DCT shall be guided by the party's principles and commitments to serve the Tsa Wa Sum with unconditional loyalty, dedication, commitment and integrity, protect and uphold the Constitution in letter and spirit, and work towards safeguarding the independence, sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the Kingdom of Bhutan. DCT will also ensure that every citizen enjoys liberty, equality, justice and solidarity and promote democratic values, institutions and the rule of law, and protect civil and democratic rights of citizens.

Our foremost task would be to foster a democratic precedent where citizens have greater say and role in passing of laws and policies. We believe in a bottom-up approach and greater citizen participation in the decision-making process.

DNT: The guiding principle is already stated as Justice, freedom and solidarity. The foremost task will be to guarantee the independence of the democratic institutions and to empower them to carry out their responsibilities as enshrined in the constitution. We will work closely as partners with them for the next five years.

 **Let's talk about issues. What is your take on criminalization of drug users for instance?**

BKP: One cannot blame people or individuals who are into substance abuse. This is a problem that needs to be solved at the source rather than a reactionary approach downstream. BKP has creative and innovative way forwards to address the concern.

DCT: DCT believes that the solution to youth problems is not punishment. For a fact, criminalization of substance abusers has not been effective in bringing down the number of drugs users or deaths caused by drug overdose. Despite stringent punishments, a large amount of contraband continues to be smuggled into the country and a lot of our young still do drugs. Every year we lose a few precious lives to the menace of drugs. This is indeed a very heart-wrenching situation. But what is even painful is the fact that we have come up with a so-called one-size-fit-all solution – criminalizing drug abusers.

COVER STORY



PRESIDENTS OF THE THREE NEW POLITICAL PARTIES
L-R: SONAM TOBGAY (BHUTAN KUEN-NYAM PARTY), LILY WANGCHUK (DRUK CHIRWANG TSHOGPA), DORJI CHODEN (DRUK NYAMRUP TSHOGPA)

DCT believes in getting to the root cause of the drug problem with multi-dimensional approach. We will address the challenge related to substance abuse by enhancing greater awareness amongst youth, promoting better relationships between parents and children, teachers and students, strictly monitoring and controlling the inflow of drugs into the country, supporting and increasing the number of rehabilitation center, and enhanced counseling among others.

DNT: They should not be criminalized rather they should be helped with programs that take them away from using drugs. We must build rehabilitation programs and employ counselors that help them in their efforts. We must also raise awareness and create a caring society that does not further discriminate them.

What are your views on abortion?

BKP: This is something that requires larger stakeholder consultations and greater discourse.

DCT: The abortion law needs to be relooked. Instead of having a blanket law of such kind, which is of course influenced by our deep respect and regard for Buddhist values and sentiments, there is a need for more liberal and realistic interpretation of how abortion is understood. The reality is a lot of Bhutanese women and young girls resort to unsafe abortions in Indian towns across the border. Most of the time, they return home with severe health complications. Some have lost their lives.

The fundamental question we must ask ourselves is why do Bhutanese women resort to abortion in the first place.

What is forcing them to take that extreme step, which is not just illegal but also a sinful act? And therein lies the problem and the solution. We must weigh the pros and cons of legalizing abortion. If it does more good than harm, why not? But to start with, we must at least have frank discussions and debates on abortion at all levels of our society.

DNT: Whether it should be legal or not will be determined by the people. Like all other decisions, we will hold widespread consultations and depending on the collective wisdom, will institute mechanisms for addressing them.

What about alcohol and unemployment?

BKP: These are specific issues that requires specific solutions, BKP will offer them at an opportune time.

DCT: Unemployment is the biggest challenge faced by youth with more than a few thousand graduates and several thousand Class X and XII dropouts without jobs. To address youth unemployment, DCT plans to cooperate closely with the private sector by creating an enabling environment for private sector development and with provision of special temporary measures and incentives. It also plans to widen the diversity of courses offered at Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) and increasing the number of VTI's across the country. It will further provide enhanced skills development and internship opportunities for youth, promote better working environment for blue collar jobs; encourage transparent recruitment system; strengthen career education in schools; and encourage entrepreneurship, creativity, innovation amongst youth.

Alcoholism is definitely one of the biggest causes of health and social problems in the Bhutanese society. Yet we recognize that it would be next to impossible to completely stop people from drinking in a country where alcohol is a cultural indulgence of sort. Heavy taxation on alcohol products isn't the solution either. This has only encouraged more people to shift to cheaper and stronger alcohol products that do more damage to their health in the process. DCT would therefore emphasize on education, advocacy, and awareness. We believe putting in place stronger rules do not necessarily translate into positive results. For instance, look at the Tobacco Control Act. Despite being so stringent, people still smoke and tobacco products are still available. It has only fuelled a thriving tobacco black market in Bhutan.

DNT: We will address all issues through consensus and through evidence based decision making. These issues need to be addressed urgently and concretely. They have been well thought about and we have proposed some ideas which we will take to the people in our manifesto.

What do you have to say about the high profile Gyalpozhing case?

BKP: A case of such stature must involve a lot more individuals; therefore my own curiosity is why is it limited to the Speaker Jigmi Tsultrum and Home Minister Minjur Dorji.

DCT: Gyalpozhing case is the epitome of the Anti Corruption Commission's fight against corruption. Although the corruption case is an old one, perpetrated many years ago, the investigation into the case and the court's verdict is a landmark event in our fight against corruption. This case sends a loud and clear message that the corrupt will be brought to book eventually.

DCT will be ruthless in the fight against corruption. We will never defend or protect a corrupt individual, even if he or she is from our own party. Ultimately those in power must be accountable to the people.

DNT: We have good laws in the country and an independent judiciary has looked at the case and has passed judgment at the district level. Now that the case is going to the high court, we are confident that our legal system will go through the case and pass judgment that is in keeping with our national laws. We have full faith and trust in our judiciary to make the right decision. Anyone who breaks the law must be brought to task and the law must take its course.

What do you have to say about the DPT government's performance in the past five years?

BKP: Given the ground realities of our country in terms of financial and human resources, the DPT must have given their best. However, if BKP secures the mandate, we would like to build on what has been achieved so far and try to carry the nation forward ensuring people are at the center of development.

DCT: As the first democratically elected government, DPT had a huge mandate. To some extent, it has fared well and we must give credit to DPT for what it has achieved. However, DPT has left several holes that need to be filled.

It has done far too little to create a fair and equitable society, and in reconciling the yawning gap between the rich and the poor. Its efforts in empowering youth, women and vulnerable sections of our society have had little effect and efficacy. They have talked about happiness the world over but have done little to create favorable conditions for our people to live happier, healthier, and prosperous lives.

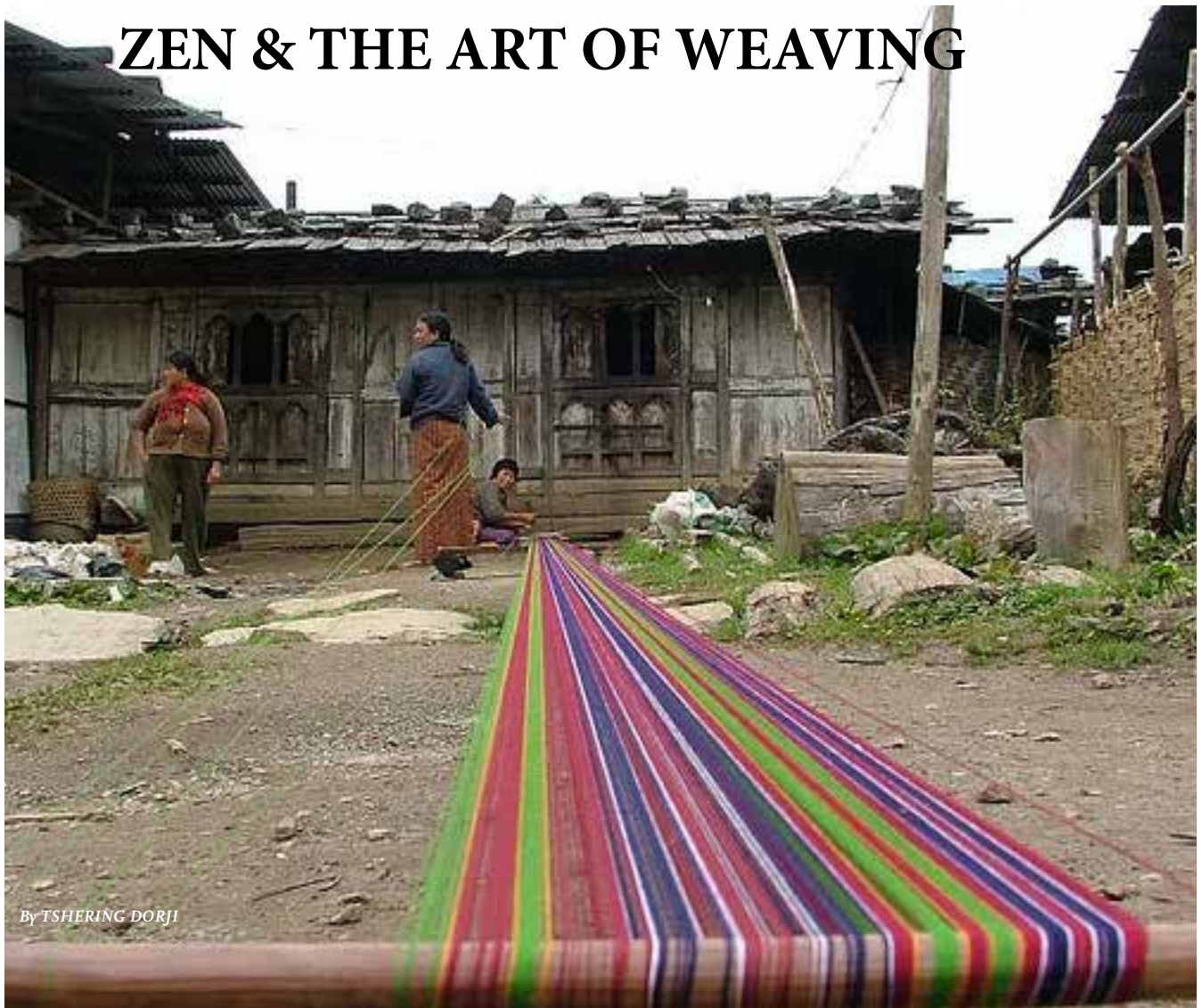
There is growing disenchantment among our people. Thousands of our youth are jobless. Economic growth has not guaranteed a simultaneous growth in jobs. Our graduates and school dropouts are not equipped with necessary life skills and know-how to take on the demanding challenges of the world of work. Our villages - the cradle of our civilization - are falling apart and disappearing from our rural landscape while our towns and cities are bursting at the seams. Crime has become the mainstay of our media, and all sorts of social ills continue to plague our society.

Our economy is in a mess. The Rupee crisis has exposed our economic vulnerabilities, magnifying our excessive dependence on external resources. In fact, we have been importing almost everything from vegetable to luxury goods, far beyond sustainable limits. Juxtaposed to that, our agriculture production has significantly diminished over the years. Our manufacturing base is too small. Private sector, the engine of growth, is still a fledgling, suffering from poor, myopic policy intervention and unfriendly business climate.

There is still so much to do. In this light, DPT's performance has been far from satisfactory.

DNT: That is a question that more than 700,000 Bhutanese must ask themselves when they go to the polls. Each of us will have our own opinion and whether the present government's performance was satisfactory or not will be determined by the outcome of the 2013 elections. ■

ZEN & THE ART OF WEAVING



By TSHERING DORJI

Zangmo is a 42-year-old with three children. When her husband, a mere farmer, passed away ten years ago she was destitute, because she didn't have an education, had no house, and no property to sustain a living. Her children were three, six and fourteen, all dependents. With no job and no income, times became extremely difficult. But there was one thing that did save Zangmo;

the fact that she knew how to weave. She had learned the art when she was in her teens, but had not focused much on it when she farmed beside her husband. After her husband's demise, however, she would turn to it and discover that this knowledge and skill was a saving grace. When it helped bring in a regular income to keep her children in school and bring food to the home, she worked passionately at it.


↑
WEAVING HAS ALLOWED WOMEN TO EITHER SUPPLEMENT THE FAMILY INCOME OR EVEN TAKE OVER AS THE SOLE INCOME EARNERS.

Living in a makeshift hut, Zangmo weaves all day while her children go to school. With her feet on the foot-pedal loom she sits bent over the contraption passing the threads back and forth with her hands, while her feet shift away at the pedals. Unlike the back strap loom weavers who produce the more expensive and intricate designs on silk which take almost a year to weave, but bring in thousands,

she works on the more simple cotton ones which take about a week. She completes around two ghos or kiras a week and each one brings her about Nu 3,500 to 4,000.

“My customers are mostly office goers and I weave simple but traditional clothes to suit them,” she said. With fashion conscious officers who desired the more natural home made material, the demand was good. Ten years of weaving managed to put her children through school and even her oldest to Sherubtse College.

“I have a high regard for Bhutanese textile and the art of weaving,” she said, adding that it makes her feel proud when she sees people wearing their ghos



Come winter the village of Khoma in Kurtoe Lhuentse reverberates with the sound of the wooden beater hitting the warp as the women weave the famous Kushutharas.

and kiras that she might have woven.

Although this is the story of just one woman in Bhutan, there are thousands like Zangmo, who weren't fortunate enough to get an education. They, therefore, remained confined to farming, or as dependents on their husband's income. But the art of weaving has empowered so many rural women. A simple skill that has allowed them to either supplement the family income or even take over as the sole income earners.

One Bhutanese woman recalls that in the 70's, her mother was uneducated and her father was an office goer. But because her mother was passionate about weaving, the monthly income she brought to the home sometimes surpassed her father's.

Weaving in Bhutan is not confined to just ghos and kiras. It is a skill and tradition that, thanks to people still wearing the national dress, has become even more fortified with new patterns and thread combinations being explored. Tablecloths, place mats, bags, purses, bed-slippers and a host of other items are now being popularly used.

In Bumthang, Sheep wool is used in weaving yathra, a thick heavy material that is ubiquitous in that region. Yak hair, meanwhile, is still used by herders for tents, and for jackets that not only keep the wind out, but also the rain. It is an encouraging sign for the textile cottage industry to see that these homespun materials are still used and increasingly in demand.

A civil servant from Bumthang said that having a yathra weaver in the family

meant being able to bring home all the daily necessities in the olden days – nothing much has changed in that respect. Possessing the knowledge is a great investment especially for people who couldn't and cannot afford an education. Today, yathra dealers in Bumthang are, in fact, also providing temporary employment to school students. At the most they employ about 10 students to weave while they're on vacation. Because the demand for the material is high, most yathra weavers prefer using the wool from India, because although Bhutanese wool is of greater quality it is more expensive.

Women from eastern Bhutan are known, particularly for their great “hand” in weaving especially with the back strap looms. It can take seven days to six months, depending on the material and the textile pattern used, and sometimes even a year, if the details are intricate and plenty.

Every region in Bhutan specialized in its own style and kind of product. Tashigang is known for its Bura (raw silk) textiles, Kurtoe or Lhuntse for its Sesho (fine silk) and Bumthang for Mathra, Yathra and other woolen textiles. Even the patterns have different names and Bhutanese textile connoisseurs can tell you just by looking at it. For instance there is the shinglochem – which means leaves and branches.

Come winter the village of Khoma in Kurtoe Lhuentse reverberates with the sound of the wooden beater hitting the warp as the women weave the famous kushutharas. Kushuthara is a special kind of kira made with silk and is ranked as one of the best kind of kiras to own. Its origins in the dzongkhag go back several centuries. Each kushuthara

● **IN BUMTHANG, SHEEP WOOL IS USED IN WEAVING YATHRA, A THICK HEAVY MATERIAL THAT IS UBIQUITOUS IN THAT REGION.**

● **YAK HAIR, MEANWHILE, IS STILL USED BY HERDERS FOR TENTS, AND FOR JACKETS THAT NOT ONLY KEEP THE WIND OUT, BUT ALSO THE RAIN.**

ARTICLE

has the signature of its weaver who designs patterns depending on the occasion that the kushuthara is to be worn for. For more important occasions, the patterns are more intrinsic and dense.

In the village of Khoma, the harvest season has just wrapped up and the women, who were busy in the fields, side by side with the men, now congregate in groups of six to ten and set up their back-strap looms in rows in the harvested paddy fields. Sheltered by bamboo canopies they sing, gossip, joke, and weave. The youngest weaver is around eight. This is nothing strange, because children often sit beside their mothers and fool around on little looms that have been made for

them. This has been the art and tradition of Khoma, passed down from generation to generation. A life style, a way of living, all in danger of disappearing if it changes.

Meanwhile, just before the Tshecu festivals in Thimphu and Paro, Ap Sithar, 50, from Khoma packs whatever his wife and two daughters have woven and heads to the west. Each kira can fetch between Nu. 75,000 (\$1,400) to about Nu.100,000 (\$2000). In Thimphu stores, however, they even go higher.

In 2001, the country's first textile museum was opened under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Sangay Choden Wangchuck to revive the

culture of weaving and to ensure that the weaving art forms was not lost.

Rinzin O, Dorji from the Royal Textile Academy said the masterful artwork of Bhutanese textile represents a sophisticated approach to the production of objects of daily use.

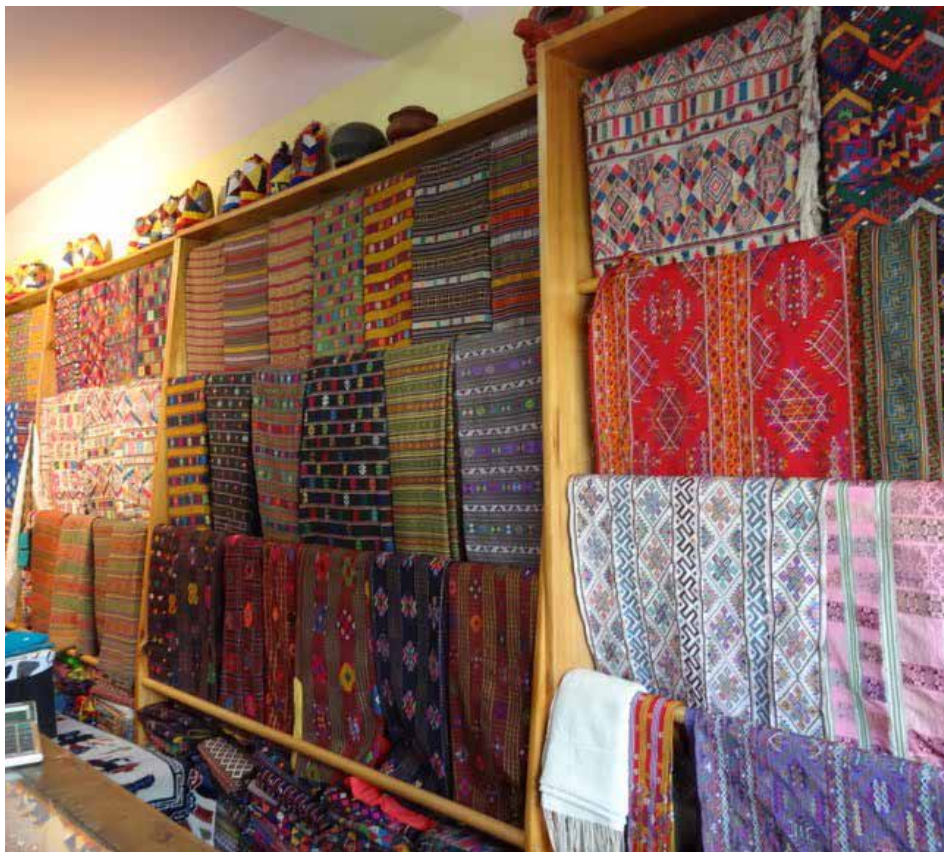
Urbanization, however, has been a hindrance to the art in the rural areas, according to her. "As the country integrates itself into the world economy, rural life has gradually evolved towards urbanization and many mothers are no longer able to teach their daughters the art of weaving," she said.

Till now there were no large scale programs to conserve and preserve the nation's many textile treasures for posterity. A few conservation programs were initiated in the past, but these were not sustained.

National Design Competitions and Fashion Shows were organized annually. These initiatives have resulted in renewed interest in new designs and patterns of kiras – pesar designs – there has been a visible boom in the weaving industry. These events have also helped Bhutanese textiles emerge and reclaim its place in the market after cheap, poly, machine woven material from India, copying all the Bhutanese traditional patterns flooded the market at one stage. While the famous "Sephub" material – called so because he was the largest dealer of the machine manufactured ghos and kiras – still has its uses, it is encouraging that stores selling traditional weaves are taking over.

The Royal Textile Academy

↓
KIRAS ON DISPLAY
AT THE TEXTILE
MUSEUM





of Bhutan continues to educate, promote, and preserve Bhutanese Textiles. It also strives to create international awareness and encourage international collaboration to promote mutually beneficial exhibitions and educational programs. The Academy is the first institution in the country that will professionally educate the Bhutanese in internationally accepted methods and techniques of conservation and preservation of the priceless textiles and other artefacts, through a well equipped and well managed conservation centre. 90 women have had the opportunity to enhance their

knowledge on various aspects of textile arts such as, preparation of warp, color combinations, weaving hor, tima etc. They also focus on market trends, and importance in quality of products.

At the National institute of Zorig Chusum, (School of Traditional Arts) in Thimpu, the weavers aged 17 to 25, come from all over the country. Though most are from the east where the weavers are regarded the best. Competition amongst weavers is spreading in Bhutan and these young girls hope to bring their skills and develop them into something more akin to a fine art.

- **IN 2001, THE COUNTRY'S FIRST TEXTILE MUSEUM WAS OPENED UNDER THE PATRONAGE OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN MOTHER SANGAY CHODEN WANGCHUCK.**

Bhutanese textiles represent a rich and complex repository of a unique art form. They are recognized for their abundance of color, sophistication and variation of patterns. The intricate dyeing and weaving techniques, which are largely organic, also ensure a superior quality of the fabrics. The weavers, who are mostly women, must not be seen merely as creators of wealth, but also as the innovators and owners of an artistic skill so deeply entrenched in tradition and history, developed and nurtured over centuries of time. 🐦

PHOTO ESSAY

The Pursuit of Happiness

↓ The people in the capital observed the International Day of Happiness with the unfurling of the giant Guru Thongdrel at the courtyard of Tashichhodzong.



← A student strikes a pose for the camera.



AZHA KEZA, A FREELANCE PHOTOJOURNALIST AND TRAVEL GUIDE, CAPTURES PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE, FRAME BY FRAME, DURING THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF HAPPINESS IN THIMPHU.

March 20, the International Day of Happiness, didn't turn out to be as corny as expected. For a long time it seemed like the Bhutanese cynics had taken to social media to complain about how "Unhappy" they were with everything "Happiness" that Bhutan was espousing. However, when the day of Happiness arrived, Facebook and Twitter were teeming with cheerful greetings and contemplative statuses on what happiness meant to people. It was a day, indeed, that called for reflection as to what made people happy, what happiness meant to them, and to be appreciative of things that made them happy.

In a world bent on economic affluence and reducing human security, the initiative to declare a day of happiness, we are proud to say, came from our tiny Kingdom, where the happiness of the people has been at the heart of all development policies and activities. This development philosophy all began as early as the 70's with the Fourth King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who was just a young monarch then.

The journey of Happiness becoming an International Day has been long. The Prime Minister who has been crusading the Fourth King's message at the UN General Assembly and at many other international forums finally

caught the attention of the world when the UN decided to adopt it as a resolution in the overall pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals in 2011. The resolution also called on a "balanced approach" to economic growth that would lead to sustainable development, poverty eradication, happiness and well being of the planet. Following up to that, the UN then declared March 20 as the International Day of Happiness in 2012 with the first day being observed in 2013. The resolution called on all member states to observe the Happiness Day through education and public awareness activities.

In Bhutan numerous events were organized to mark the day. In Thim-





⤴ The clock Tower Square pulled a huge crowd with various performances lined up for the day and a variety of food stalls to choose from.

➡ An elderly citizen enjoying a show at the Centenary Park.

⤵ A school girl shies away from the camera while another takes a peek - at the Norzin Lam stretch.



PHOTO ESSAY



phu the Guru Thongdrol, a giant appliqué, was unfurled for the public, as it is believed people gain liberation at sight. Celebrations followed in the Norzin Lam, which was closed for traffic. Thimphu residents, tourists and artists came together to celebrate the day with day long musical

performances by popular local artists, singers, musicians and dancers.

Led by Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley, officials and people from all walks of life paid tribute to the founding visionary of His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck for



All is well, according to this old timer - enroute to Dochula from Thimphu.

gifting the world with “Happiness,” a conscience of sorts while in the pursuit of economic wealth and development.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his address, urged to reinforce our commitment to inclusive and sustainable human development and renew our pledge



↑ The Prime Minister and his family watch dancers from the court of the Third King perform at the Centenary Park in Thimphu.

→ Students line up to offer flowers before the flag hoisting ceremony at Tashichhodzong.



to help others. “When we contribute to the common good, we ourselves are enriched. Compassion promotes happiness and will help build the future we want,” he said.

Today, world leaders, economists and social thinkers around the world acknowledge that GDP

is not necessarily the most reliable yardstick to measure growth, because it does not take into consideration the social costs that come with an increasing GDP. While most may not have bought into GNH, it is so far one alternative to this measure. 🐦

HAPPENINGS

Belgium Observes first International Day of Happiness

As in Bhutan, the first International Day of Happiness on Wednesday March 20 was celebrated in many parts of the European Union. In Brussels, the Belgian Centre for Fine Arts (Bozar), the United Nations Regional Information Centre (UNRIC) and the Royal Bhutanese Embassy jointly co-hosted a special event to mark the day.

Despite the short notice within which the event was planned, the observance of the day of happiness generated much media coverage and the Bozar auditorium was filled to its capacity of 476 seats despite the entry fee of six euros per ticket. While most of the audience were ordinary Belgian citizens, there was also a good representation of the diplomatic corps, media and some who came all the way from the Netherlands, France and Germany.



It was reported that several people had to be turned away due to lack of space.

The event which was held at the Bozar consisted of a screening of a documentary film '7 Milliards

d'autres ' (7 Billion Others) which portrayed the views of people from around the world on happiness. This was followed by presentations by a group of eminent Europeans closely involved in promoting happiness - contemporary international artist Koen Van Mechelen, Writer Leo Bormans (editor of The World Book of Happiness), Belgian Senator Peter Van Rompuy and Jan-Emmanuel De Neve (lecturer at City College, London). The Speakers gave a general view of the current state of play of science concerning happiness; relationship between happiness growth; the Belgian perspective on where the policy-makers stand and how culture influence happiness. Bhutanese Ambassador Sonam Tshong talked on the Bhutanese experience and how and why we were contributing to the global conversation on happiness and the quest for a better development paradigm. 





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FEATURE

HOW NECESSARY ARE THE ARTS TO OUR SOCIETY?

By PEKY SAMAL

Art is a word that constantly redefines our cultural, aesthetic and creative boundaries.

During the Second World War, the British government wanted to cut the arts funding and put it into the war efforts prompting the Prime Minister Winston Churchill to say, “Then what are we fighting for?”

In Bhutan, we have arrived at a time to ask such a question too. Where are the Arts, or how necessary are the Arts to our society?

As filmmaker, photographer and sometimes writer, Tashi Gyeltshen put it: “One inspired line of poetry can nurture a generation of poets; it can arouse patriotism for a lifetime. Art unites and brings diverse people together to celebrate, inspire, and be inspired.”

He added that when economic progress makes people materialistic, art makes us human and reminds us of Gross National Happiness.

Most artists *The Raven* spoke to said that Bhutanese culture and history is rich with art in the form of religious scrolls

(thangkas), woodwork, exquisite textiles, music, and dance. But many felt that certain “modern” areas like the film industry still have a long way to go before they can move past “commercialism”.

As for the traditional art that is practiced in Bhutan, Asha Kama, the founder of the Voluntary Artists’ Studio (VAST) in Thimphu said that religion has overshadowed art in Bhutan.

For example, he asked if the Bhutanese ever viewed the Paro Thongdrel as an amazing work of art or appreciated the craftsmanship of a burl bowl.



“Instead we believe that if we eat from this bowl the poison will be neutralized. Do you ever try to seek out the artist who has created the beautiful kira you are wearing?”

It is true that the culture and tradition of the artwork not being signed and artists remaining anonymous has not helped the image of artists throughout our history. Art in many societies has always been intertwined with religion. However, in the west, Artists were always given recognition when works of religious art were commissioned by allowing them to leave their signature on their work. This is how we know which artists sculpted or painted the work. Unfortunately in the east, owing to the fact that the work of art – statue or painting of the Buddha, Avolokiteshvara or whatever deity – was supposed to be sacred or for whatever reason, the artist’s names were never featured on the piece of work, and so we never came to know of who the great artists were, or whose works we were looking at. This practice still exists in the traditional painting schools. Works are still not signed and they still remain anonymous. Not so much in the contemporary field.

Asha Kama explained that Bhutanese traditional art is dedicated to religion and its purpose is to serve religion while contemporary art is “self reflection, belief, and desire that is expressed in the form of art.” “But what we call contemporary in Bhutan is called traditional art in America!”

Another artist, Rajesh Gurung, feels that art is a very broad and expansive term. He said that in the Bhutanese context though, there is a deep appreciation, or rather veneration for any traditional art.

“Art and religion are therefore not exclusive of one another. Contemporary art, however, is new and is at the best treated with raised eyebrows,” he added.

Meanwhile artist Karma Wangchuk feels that art should be incorporated in schools as a subject of study because contemporary art has already taken root within society and people are beginning to explore ideas and different forms. He said it is sad that few Bhutanese know of contemporary art and artists or even of the art scenario of other places in the world.

“We don’t need to replicate what artists elsewhere are doing. What we create here today is contemporary for the artists here,” he said, but hinted that artists should at least have the knowledge or awareness of developments in other countries.

VAST has been given major credit for bringing contemporary Bhutanese art into the limelight.

“But I think more needs to be done,” said Tashi Gyeltshen.


Asked if there was a chasm between Bhutanese traditional art and contemporary art, Rajesh Gurung said that it was huge, but that it does not mean it can’t be bridged.

The general feeling at the moment is that Bhutanese lack aesthetic sense or an appreciation for art.

Rajesh Gurung feels that there is no support even from the authorities for artists.

Asha Kama, on the other hand, said that it is high time that media houses have art critics. Unfortunately, not just anyone can become an art critic though.

Critics are experts of a subject and, therefore, have the eye for the details and the nuances of a piece of work that might escape the ordinary viewer. There are standards for style and forms that



“ONE INSPIRED LINE OF POETRY CAN NURTURE A GENERATION OF POETS; IT CAN AROUSE PATRIOTISM FOR A LIFETIME. ART UNITES AND BRINGS DIVERSE PEOPLE TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE, INSPIRE, AND BE INSPIRED.”

only someone who has studied the subject of art can take on to pass such judgment. It is the same with being a food, movie or restaurant critic. Given that we lack experts or people who are specialized in these subjects we have to rely on people who may have an interest and passion for these subjects, to take it on. Unfortunately very few writers seem to pursue these subjects or treat them as specialized subjects or beats, even by journalists, so it is too much to ask of the media.

But Asha Karma seems to think differently. “It’s never too late,” he says. “We should start now with an art review column or dedicate a quarter of a page to art and promote art and artists,” he said. “A few years ago when I suggested this to some papers, I was told that I am looking for personal promotion!”

Meanwhile, Tashi Gyeltshen enumerated the various benefits of art by saying that it keeps our youth culturally aware

and cohesive by contributing to community vitality.

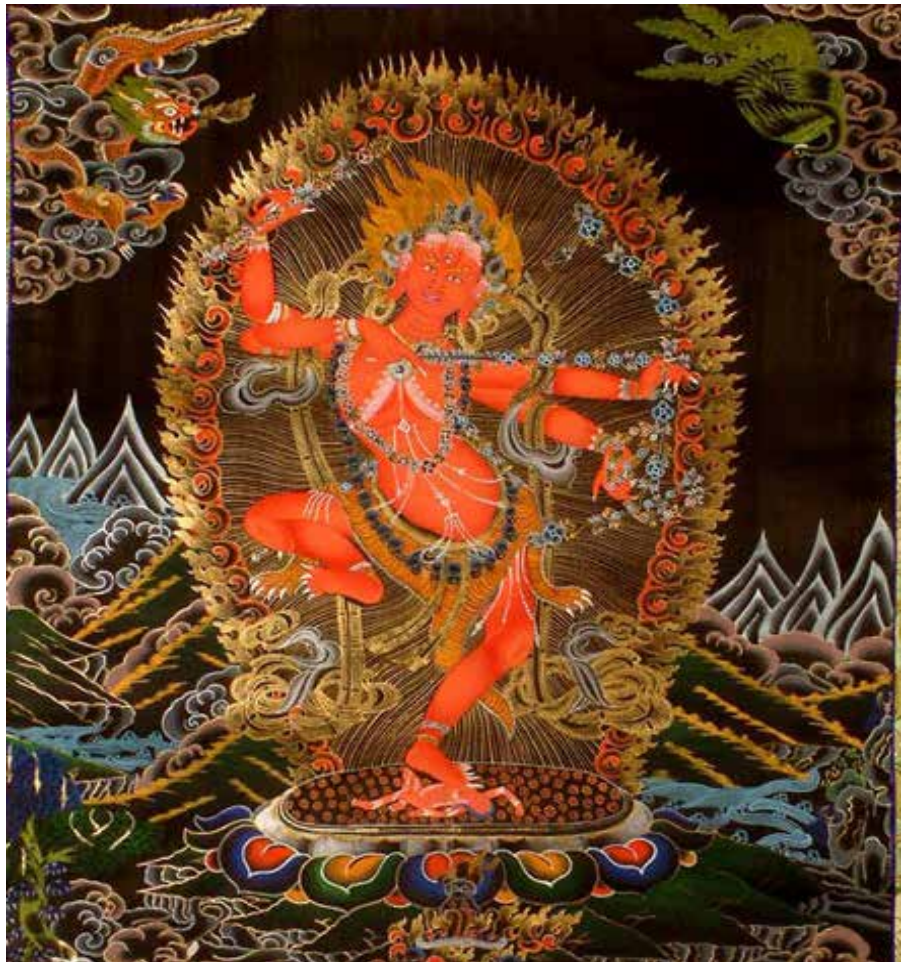
Art, he said, is a tool for education and transformation, and importantly for self-healing. A growing body of research points to the arts as an engine for civic renewal. Citizen engagement in the arts creates a spirited, shared identity and inculcates pride in a state's cultural heritage.

"Today, around the world the arts play an integral role as a part of soft power. The exercise of soft power is one of the main ways to make a country better known and better understood to the outside world. Art is a very effective and subtle way of protecting the sovereignty and security of the nation by establishing the distinct state brand identity."

To promote art in Bhutan he said, "we could begin small with an art endowment fund. Then later explore ways to build more funds and include other stakeholders and start putting in place policies and programs."

"We should have our own Mountain Echoes where our children and aspiring writers would read and listen to our own literary icons. VAST should have a much greater presence around the country. We should also start our own Buddhist Film Festival."

But Mountain Echoes was set up to do exactly that – to have our children and aspiring writers listen to our own literary icons. Only thing is we don't have enough published authors to feature and so we invite Indian writers to share the platform with Bhutan. This is equally inspiring in that Indian writers share their works of literature with us. As for our own film festival, "Beskop Tsechu," which translated means "Movie Festival" is already in the works. Buddhist movies might be narrowing it down too much, but having one that relates to the Himalayan region might be more practical.



↑ A PAINTING OF A VAJRAYOGINI

But one thing to remember is that art – and its various forms – flourishes only when people are given free reign to their creativity. We saw a renaissance in Bhutanese language, dress and music, only after the film and music industry were allowed to flourish. When rules and regulations kept creativity under a bind, there was nothing but a dry spell. It is the same with art. Now that we have people experimenting with different forms and styles we have seen private galleries pop up. These are encouraging signs, but more has to be done. Not every child is academically inclined. Sometimes their talents can lie in the

arts. They can be good actors, painters, sculptors or musicians. If the government explores ways of opening up and strengthening the avenues to these areas we may see a more balanced and well-rounded society. Currently these are looked upon as career paths that are frivolous and not worth pursuing, which is a shame because as George Bernard Shaw said: "without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable."



The writer, a freelance journalist, is the former editor of The Bhutanese.



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TRAVEL



WHEN IN DELHI...

After the peace and quiet of Paro valley you'll be excused for suffering a culture shock when you land in Delhi. It is a city boiling with multitudes and swarming with diversity – race, religion, creed and kind. It is also a city that accosts you immediately. Once you hit its streets the people

are everywhere and in your face too. "Hello! Taxi?" you might be asked eagerly. "Excuse me! Need hotel?" "Need comb sir, toothpaste? Hanky? How about mirror?" "Sir, I give best deal." The hawkers, they're everywhere.

Still the rewards are many. On a recent trip, I quickly abandoned

↑
**PAHARGANJ,
BUSTLING WITH
ACTIVITY EVEN IN
THE MIDDAY HEAT**

my baggage trolley, flung my backpack across my shoulders and set off resolutely to explore the capital of the world's largest democracy, constructed over seven known ancient cities.

Delhi's proud and historic Mughal heritage is evident in its storied architecture and cuisine, while echoes of its British Raj elegance are still visible in the



By MITRA RAJ

Visitors can easily spend half the day immersed in the ancient attractions of the glorious Lal Quila (Red Fort), the Jama Masjid and the medieval bazaars of Old Delhi, and the other half reviving themselves over frothy cappuccinos or icy cocktails at any one of the city's swanky cafés and bars.

For shoppers, the city is choc-a-bloc with sprawling malls, all new, boasting the latest in global brands. Or head over to bargain at the famed flea markets of Janpath and Sarojini Nagar, two old bargain open markets where you can pick up almost anything under the sun.

Bazaars Galore

Many other shopping centers across the city offer an insight into the breadth of India's rich artistic heritage. Connaught Place, Karol Bagh and Chandni Chowk are where you'll want to start. Emporia representing every state in the nation can be seen at the famous Baba Kharak Singh Marg, near Parliament Street. If you're tired of bargaining, the prices at Baba Kharak Singh Marg are fair too (set by the government to lubricate tourism and regional handicrafts), and all conveniently housed under one roof.

For those beguiled by ethnic chic, there is the Central Cottage Emporium in Jawahar Bhavan at Janpath, a visit worth every paisa. Look for deals on everything from furniture and textiles to traditional Indian shoes to small gift items and souvenirs. Similarly, the Crafts Museum at Mathura road offers some great bargains on items like shawls, pottery and paintings.

city's magnificent squares and tree-lined avenues. The first thing you hear is a jumble of vernaculars, besides Hindi and, of course, this being India, English. The regional inflections you'll encounter on the streets on any given day might include Punjabi and Urdu.

The city can also embody the best of the old and the new.

Delhi's proud & historic Mughal heritage is evident in its storied architecture and cuisine, while echoes of its British Raj elegance are still visible in the city's magnificent squares.

Hauz Khas is your destination for a bit of haute couture. The juxtaposition of its ancient buildings with contemporary shops and restaurants leaves strong impressions. It is a neighborhood teeming with Islamic history, although it is now known more for its rejuvenation from ancient neighborhood to modern, with designer labels vying for space with authentic traditional jewelry and intricate and innovative handmade creations. Haus Khas is also known for its many galleries, a small lake/tank an ancient



CHANDNI CHOWK WITH THE RED FORT IN THE BACKGROUND



TRAVEL

Islamic seminary, a mosque and a tomb dating back to the 13th Century. The name Hauz Khas is derived from the words water tank/lake or the royal lake.

For the antique hound, Sundar Nagar is the place to be while Chandni Chowk offers cheaper alternatives of the same. If you're into serious bling, walk over to Dariba Kalan, a narrow street dealing in gold and silver and fine handspun saris, typical of the living bazaars of India.

Karol Bagh is yet another famous shopping complex in the city, great for ingenious Indian clothes, footwear and accessories. If you have a wedding in mind (of the superlative Indian kind) then check out their jewelry and bridal-wear. If you're the "cool and casual" type, Janpath with its rows of shops, Sarojini Nagar and Lajpat Nagar offer a plethora of opportunities. This is also where you'd want to buy gifts and handicrafts at the best prices anywhere.

Back at Connaught Place, check out the underground shopping tunnels at Palika Bazar. This is a literal "hole in the ground" that has everything, including annoying touts and solicitors. But don't lose your cool; they only want to do business. When transactions get too steamy, simply excuse your self politely and firmly and remerge from the shopping tube for some fresh air!

If bargaining isn't exactly your thing and you're loaded with money, hire a cab for the entire day (Nu 1,000) and head straight for Gurgaon. For that is where you might want to be.

If you're looking for brand names, there's no better place for those than in India these days.



**RAJIV CHOWK METRO STATION
PACKED TO THE HILT WITH
COMMUTERS DURING RUSH
HOUR**



Finally, when you're all tired out from the shopping, trudge over to Dilli Haat for a delicious dinner of bamboo shoots and chicken over rice.

And in India, there is likely no better place than the satellite town of Gurgaon, where the term globalization is no longer a theoretical term but a daily reality. It bombards your senses from advertisement billboards, radio and television, evidence of the recent surge of foreign collaborations in consumer goods with India. With extremely steep prices abroad, foreigners visiting India can pick up international brands at significantly lower prices. Beware! You might be tempted to buy more than what you need.

Music aficionados will dig the Music Shop at Khan Market, Rhythm Corner at South Extension, Blues in Defence



TRAVEL DETAILS



Accommodation

Delhi has a varied choice of mid-range hotels between the hostels and five-star luxe to suit the budget of every traveler.



Climate

Best time to travel (October - March).

Colony and Sheilma and Pyramids in Palika Bazar. India is a musical country and Delhi has a thing for it. CDs and DVDs are cheap and the audio quality is good. However, if it is the latest gadgets and software that you're looking for, Nehru Place is where you should be.

Finally, when you're all tired out from the shopping, trudge over to Dilli Haat for a delicious dinner of bamboo shoots and chicken over rice - a specialty of the north eastern state of Nagaland. But wait, even here there's one last opportunity for me to pick up a much-needed Kashmiri rug for my cold room in Thimphu! And, here's a tip just for the Bhutanese travelers: a

wide variety of silk Tego materials are available at the INA Market across street.

After all the commercial exploring for this piece, I distinctly began to crave a sense of quiet, which is no small matter in the bustling heart of this city, because finding respite from it all can be challenging.

But fortunately I know just such a place—the Lotus Temple.

Surrounded by lush gardens and fountains this interesting landmark—literally in the shape of a lotus—is a monument to the Baha'i faith, which eschews all idolatry. The temple interior is refreshingly free of the visual clutter associated with most religious buildings. The temple



INDIA GATE, ONE OF DELHI'S MANY LANDMARKS, AT THE HEART OF THE CITY

also provides an opportunity to learn firsthand about this interesting religion based on the pacifistic teachings of Baha'u'llah, who believed that god is neither male nor female and transcends gender.

As the day ends and darkness descends, the magic of artificial lighting slowly turns the "lotus" translucent. I sit and watch this tranquil building dedicated to a faith based on simplicity and, one by one, the many little things that have jangled my nerves all day begin to subside. A cool breeze brings me back to my senses, reminding me that Delhi can, despite everything, also be peaceful and quiet. 🐦

A FAVOUR



By KARMA SINGYE DORJI

What the Chief said next took Diamond completely by surprise. “Look, if you really must go after this story, it’s fine with me but just make sure you get your facts straight. Give me something to work with here. Give me something with which to cover us from the flak that’s sure to follow.” Then, he smiled wearily and added, “After all, what’s a story without a little edge of danger. Now get out of here and don’t waste my time!” The words suggested irritation but the dancing light in the Chief’s eyes suggested otherwise. “Thanks,” Diamond said simply and rose quickly to leave, not trusting himself to express the gratitude he felt.

Diamond returned to his cubicle, dialed a number, spoke briefly, then gathered his things and left.

The small blue sedan with the words Mountain Mirror: Reflecting back our Times painted in white letters wound its way slowly through the busy markets of the capital, inching along the bustling main street behind cars pulling in and out of the crowded parking spaces in front of primary business hubs in the capital: the National Insurance Corporation building, the Royal Bank and the National Securities Exchange. Eventually the traffic eased and the driver, a loquacious young man from the eastern districts kept up a steady patter, most of it expressing his growing surprise at the increasing size of the walled-off homes and mansions they passed as they climbed higher up the valley. After a while his amazement gave way to fear when he realized that Diamond intended him to keep driving further up mountain. It was evident the poor young man was newly arrived from the districts and none of the other reporters had yet taken him this far up the “hills,” as the neighbourhood was euphemistically known in the chat-rooms of the Mountain Mirror. “Only, my lama knows!” the young man exclaimed suddenly as the road widened, became smoother and began climbing even further up the mountain into tall wooded forests of pine and fir. The road was quite deserted now, and the driver kept looking aside at Diamond as if pleading with him to not make him go any further.

The houses were now set much further back from the road and partly hidden by the stately trees that stood watch over the manicured grounds.



Finally,
Diamond in-
structed the
driver to turn
off the main
road to enter a
long driveway
over strewn
with golden
pine needles.

“Oh my dear lama!” said the young man again, pointing at a beautiful winding driveway with blooming rhododendron hedges on either side of it. “That road! Why there must be a palace at the end of it!”

Finally, Diamond instructed the driver to turn off the main road to enter a long driveway over strewn with golden pine needles. The driver had stopped talking now and, instead, gaped as they pulled up to a huge double gate of solid steel. Diamond leaned over to the driver’s side and pressed on the car horn three or four times, making the young man jump with a sharp intake of breath, before the steel gates opened loudly, grating across its tracks. A vast paved courtyard was revealed, to either side of which stood rows of padlocked garages much as the stables may have stood at the fringes of a noble house in a bygone age.


Diamond stepped out and told the driver to turn the car around and leave. Then he walked the rest of the way to the heavy, ornately carved front door of the sprawling three-storied mansion surrounded by islands of emerald lawns, beautifully trimmed flowering hedges and tall trees. Behind him the two gatekeepers who had been there the entire time appeared behind the giant gates and, leaning their entire weight against the heavy steel doors, and pushing mightily with both hands, closed the entire edifice with an ominous clang.

Diamond rang the doorbell and winced as it reverberated with a loud hollow sound within the mansion. A short while later he heard the soft padding of feet as a pair of barefoot young girls opened the doors silently and let him in.

He walked down the long hallway, the soles of his shoes squeaking on the smooth polished floor. He passed two great sunrooms with glittering chandeliers and lavish cushions covered in gold fabric. There were tall wood and glass armoires displaying what looked like ancient objets d’ art. Finally, he turned down another hallway, following the girls who tapped lightly on the great door in front of them and left. Diamond hesitated for an instant before drawing a deep breath. Then he pushed the heavy doors and let himself in. Inside, there was a man and a woman. The woman had features that had once been beautiful, she was wearing sweats and pumping at an exercise machine with her feet, while her other hand held a phone to her ear. Her face was flushed, but Diamond couldn’t tell if it was from the exercise or the conversation she was having on the phone. She looked annoyed and spoke in an overbearing scolding tone. The man was wearing a black extreme-weather jacket with an expensive brand name embroidered on the chest with denim trousers. It looked like he was pouring himself a drink. He looked up and nodded at Diamond. Then he motioned at him to sit down on one of the cushions in the small seating area near the entrance to the room.

While he waited for the woman to finish her phone conversation, Diamond looked around. There was a rich smell of leather, probably from the plush seats at the other end of the room. The furnishings were clearly luxurious, and the bed at the far end of the room seemed immense. On it lay some of the softest throws of sheepskin and fur Diamond had ever seen.

“What is it?” came the sharp voice, breaking him off from his reveries.

“Sorry Aunty,” he said. “I need a favour.” 

Ablaze in The Land of Snow

By SONAM WANGMO

Not far from the Northern borders of Bhutan lies the Land of Snow, Tibet. It is a country whose history, traditions, and culture, are intertwined with Bhutan's; our strongest link to Tibet being is our religion, our Buddhist heritage. The Bhutanese and Tibetans have battled with each other sparring over territorial and religious issues, but we as neighbors cannot ignore Tibet's struggle that has continued for decades now. As fellow Buddhists, it is hard to look away from the plight of a suffering people. Just to the north of us, Tibetans have been self-immolating. They- mostly monks, but also nuns, mothers, wives, daughters, husbands and sons – have been dousing themselves in gasoline and setting their bodies aflame, while uttering



From the 1950's and through the late 1990's, Tibetans were routinely assassinated, massacred, imprisoned and intimidated.

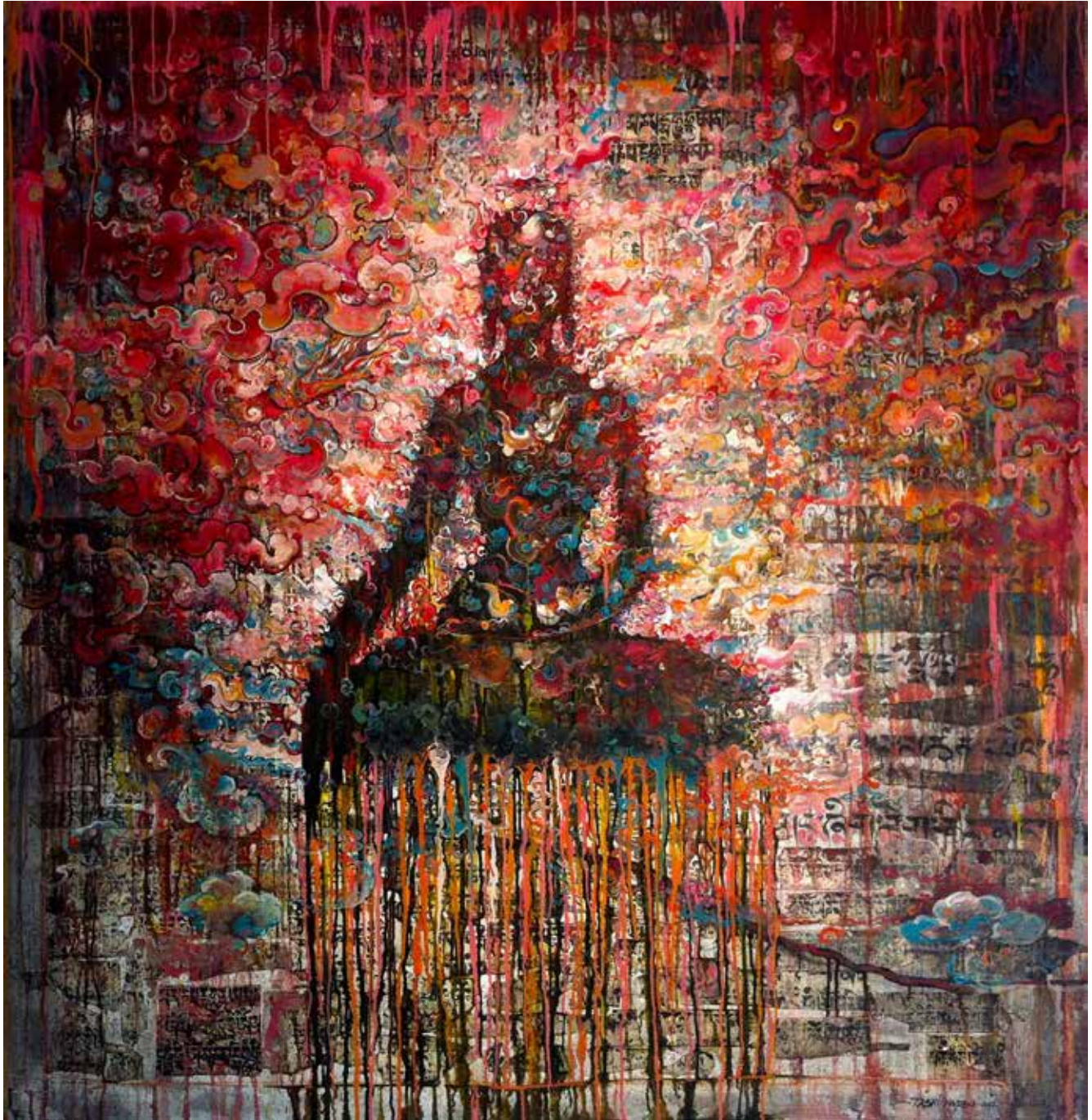
the name of Dalia Lama; a beckoning for his presence back to their homeland. They also want and shout "Rangzen," freedom for Tibet. Self-immolation has been viewed as a controversial way of drawing attention to a cause. While some claim it as violent, most Tibetans view it as a powerful and non-violent form of resistance. But self-immolation as a form of resistance and protest is not new. Alongside the Tibetan's are the Tunisians. There have been 150 immolations in Tunisia since the fall of Ben Ali in the Arab Spring

In Tibet, Self-immolations have surged to a 109 deaths since 2009. This number is not just a statistical figure, but like Tunisia it is telling of a significant story that speaks of an increase in the intensity and desperation that Tibetans feel about the many decades of living under occupation and attempts of sinicization by the Chinese government. But news of self-immolations in Tibet rarely seems to hit the worldwide media's attention, unlike suicide bombings or drone attacks. This is because the Chinese State controls the flow of information in and out of Tibet with an iron hand. However as more and more images of bodies engulfed in flames slip through China's iron grasps – with the Internet and cellular technology that is impossible to control - the world is compelled to pay attention to Tibet's woes.

Nothing speaks more succinctly than the voices of people who are going through the storm in Tibet. "Storm in the Grasslands," contains first-hand reports put together by the International Campaign For Tibet (ICT), and High Peaks Pure Earth is a blog maintained by the vociferous Tibetan writer Woesser who is currently under house arrest and writes from China despite

constant surveillance. Woesser was recently awarded and recognized as a hero by the International Women's Media Foundation. What immerses from these sources is that Tibetans are deeply aggrieved by China's repeated attempts to destroy their Buddhist traditions, culture, language and dress; through intimidation, coercion and Patriotic Reeducation designed to alter Tibetans' allegiance from the Dalai Lama and their strong Buddhist roots to the Communist party and the Chinese government. A young man laments: "Tibetans are not allowed to express their cultural identity, even in simple ways sometimes like wearing our own clothing. His Holiness is not allowed to come home. We have no rights to practice our religion properly, to pray at our temples, to live according to our religion. It is not possible to obtain a complete religious education and our hearts are broken by the way that monks and nuns are treated."

Through historical accounts of unceasing and prolonged sufferings of the Tibetans under Chinese rule we can understand intimately their frustrations and yearning for freedom and independence. From the 1950's and through the late 1990's, Tibetans were routinely assassinated, massacred, imprisoned and intimidated. In 1998, Patriotic Education campaigns were forced on all Tibetans, and monks in particular were targeted as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) views them as the institutionalized bearers of their religion and culture. The goal of these education



Painting Courtesy: Tashi Norbu

'SELF-IMMOLATION' - A PAINTING BY TASHI NORBU, BHUTANESE ARTIST BASED IN AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS. THE WORK EXPRESSES THE DUAL HOPE THAT THE SELFIMMOLATORS' SACRIFICE WILL LEAD TO THEIR RELIGIOUS REALIZATION OF ULTIMATE REALITY, THROUGH BURNING AWAY IGNORANCE, AND ALSO 'BURN AWAY' THE CONVENTIONAL REALITY OF OPPRESSION. WWW.TASHINORBU.BE

campaigns was to purge the monks and the ordinary citizens of their allegiance to the Dalai Lama and their Buddhist roots. These campaigns were largely unpopular and ultimately failed to change the loyalties of the Tibetans. This failure engendered open and covert violence towards the people of Tibet who suffered further intimidation and repression. It is under these conditions that in 2008 – the year of the China Olympics - thousands of ordinary Tibetans organized a peaceful mass protest throughout the Tibetan plateau which ended with arrests, imprisonments, and the further clamping down of the entire Tibetan region. In February 2009, a month that marks the Tibetan New Year, Kirti monks of Ngaba were disallowed from performing their annual New Year prayer. This prohibition of something so sacred and profound to the Tibetans became the cataclysmic event, igniting

the first self-immolation of Tapey, a monk in Kirti monastery of Ngaba on February 27, 2009.

Ngaba now part of Sichuan province has a long and tumultuous history with the People's Republic Of China (PRC). It was the first place of attack – owing to its proximity to the borders of China

- by the Chinese before they occupied Tibet. However even before the war with PRC, Ngaba region faced many wars with several Chinese dynasties, instilling and nurturing the spirit of resistance to people who have had to defend their borders from invaders generation after generation. It is therefore no



Ngaba has seen, disproportionately the largest concentration of people, 39 in total, mostly monks who have self-immolated.



surprise that as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continues to clamp down on the lay people and monks of Ngaba, the further the people of Ngaba will resist. Ngaba has seen, disproportionately the largest concentration of people, 39 in total, mostly monks who have self-immolated.

As compassionate fellow human beings and as people whose identities are inextricably linked because of our shared cultural practices and our Buddhist traditions, we as a Bhutanese should not ignore the developments happening just outside our borders. Furthermore, from the

Temperatures are rising rapidly in the Tibetan plateau where glaciers that feed some of our rivers - such as Kuri chhu and Amo Chhu - are drying up at an alarming pace.



point of view of what is at stake for the future of Bhutan, we should also keep a sharp eye on the ecological destruction- taking place on the Tibetan plateau. Temperatures are rising rapidly in the Tibetan plateau where glaciers that feed some of our rivers - such as Kuri chhu and Amo Chhu - are drying up at an alarming pace. Environmentalists go as far to claim that at the rate of climate change, our Himalayan glaciers may disappear by 2035. As we have seen in the past, our neighbors' troubles have a habit of becoming our troubles. For reasons of pragmatism and as fellow Buddhists, we cannot afford to ignore the predicament of our neighbors in the Land of Snow, Tibet. 

The writer worked at Chemonics International. She divides her time between her family and developing her writing craft at Grub Street in Boston.



Achyut Bhandari served for 30 years in the civil service in various capacities before retiring as the Managing Director of Bhutan Post. He is currently the Vice President of Bhutan Nyamrup Tshogpa.

THE CHALLENGES OF EMPLOYMENT TODAY

We were a total of nine graduates for employment in the civil service that year. And that number was considered large compared to the previous years. That was in 1976 when I was supposedly “competing” for a job in the civil service. Of course all of us got jobs in the government and that too in the organizations of our choice. Unlike today, the small corporate sector was no different from the government. The private sector was virtually non-existent, except for Tashi Commercial Corporation, and a few scattered family-run shops selling basic necessities, bars and restaurants. The civil service itself was entirely new to the graduates as much as for their parents. It was a given that the government was where we were going to work.

We were proud to be serving the King and country in the hope of a better life for ourselves, and our families, in the future. Expectations of personal gains and rewards were simple and modest. Most school or university graduates wanted to join the armed forces, become teachers, drivers or take up simple administrative jobs in the civil service.

All has changed today. Gone are the days when a new graduate can land a job of his or her choice. Save for a few with excellent academic results and some through connections, the others can kiss their dreams of a desk job goodbye. Today, the Bhutanese people are richer and enjoy a far better quality of life than ever before. Thanks to the country’s large investments in health, education, industrial and commercial sectors. Yet, life doesn’t get easier or simpler. The complexities that come with development and improvement don’t make our lives as simple as it used to be back then. The population of young people is much larger and they are faced with stiff competition for limited jobs. When the number of University graduates is reaching 3,000, and the number of school graduates many times over that, and our small economy does not have the capacity to absorb all of them, it means that we have a serious issue on our hands. Whether it is the private, corporate or civil service, the jobs are limited. And the zeal of ‘serving the country’ has been replaced by maximum pecuniary benefits.

Naturally, both employers and job seekers are choosy. The employers want experience and relevant training which is absent in most job seekers. But it is unfair to expect experience in a new graduate entering the job market for the first time. New job seekers complain of corruption in the selection process. The interview often becomes a mere formality with kith and kin of the interview panel or someone influential already pre-selected. Yet, without fairness and objectivity, the quality and productivity of labor is compromised adversely affecting the entire Bhutanese society. The government must step in to promote fairness and objectivity in recruitment at all levels and facilitate new employment opportunities in addition to creating new jobs and training opportunities.

The number of educational and training institutions has grown steadily and so have their outputs. But the same cannot be said about the quality and relevance of the courses they offer. Despite the oft-quoted objective of ‘wholesome education’ by our Education Ministry, the objec-

tive remains more on paper than practice. As a layman, I interpret this phrase as opportunities to be offered to students to develop their full potentials in skills, talents and intellectual growth. Is our education system; our schools and colleges, capable of fulfilling this noble objective?

Admittedly, it may be too much to expect the system to deliver given the pressure being faced by the education ministry to open up new schools and tertiary educational and training institutions. But this should not deter us from establishing a few institutions with specialized facilities to mould the minds of the young. This is to give chance to interested students to learn and develop skills in the fields of their interest from an early age, be it in carpentry, masonry, modern agriculture, electrical and mechanical trades, weaving, painting, music, drama and so on.

The existing vocational and training institutions offer some of the above courses, but these are meant for those students who drop out at middle or higher secondary levels. Students should be exposed to a variety of options from the lower secondary level itself, if not primary levels. That way, they can test their aptitudes for various vocations apart from theoretical learning. Such practice would enable them to opt for careers in which they are really interested and where they can excel rather than taking up anything that comes by for lack of clear job objectives.

Such a change is not possible by developing physical infrastructures alone for courses like the above. It must be accompanied by strong parental guidance, IQ/EQ tests and career counseling in schools. For some

reason, parents and children alike prefer technical courses regardless of the natural aptitude of the student. They do not give enough thought to the subjects in which the students can excel or to emerging job opportunities. The result is that when these students graduate, they may not find the suitable job. If students are allowed to develop and experiment with their curiosities from an early age, they are most likely to pursue their interests with clearly defined career goals.

Many years ago, a graduate confronted me at a briefing session when I said that if some of them couldn't find jobs elsewhere they should become educated farmers as agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the Bhutanese people. Ob-

viously, both he and his parents had expectations for a desk job. In other words, job seekers are reluctant to 'dirty their hands' by farming. Given the rising prices of farm products in our local markets, growing more and better varieties of foods (cereals, vegetables, fruits, meats and dairy products) would be more profitable than taking up low-paying jobs in other sectors of the economy. And this would save our dwindling agriculture and reduce pressure on our youth to migrate to urban, industrial or commercial centers. Universal electrification, expanded road and telephone connectivity, and better public services in rural areas should make such propositions more attractive to our youth. Perhaps, the time has come for the government to promote and give incentives to such ideas.

A generic problem with employment in Bhutan is that, despite 50 years of development, a disciplined and efficient work culture is generally absent in all sectors. Even the corporate employees who normally receive higher salaries than civil servants are smug about their jobs. And this does not mean that the civil servants should do less given their job security and multiple benefits. Unfortunately, the performance of our civil servants in general leaves much to be desired. Despite various rules, regulations and performance indicators, hardly any civil servant is eased out of his or her job for poor performance. Complacency, inefficiency and red tape breeds into public organizations affecting service deliveries. As the parent organization, the RCSC has become a lame duck with no vision, let alone the dynamic leadership to train and motivate civil servants to serve our increasingly demanding citizens. And ironically, new graduates continue to vie for jobs in the civil service, as the working environment is perceived to be liberal and flexible in addition to more opportunities for travel, training and higher education overseas. One therefore cannot but wonder about the quality of our civil service which has to offer professional advice and apolitical support to the government.

There is much soul searching to be done to provide jobs for the growing number of job seekers in a small economy like ours and to improve strategies to train new workers. The Bhutanese working population must learn to respect the dignity of labor, become more disciplined and result-oriented in whatever they do and up-date skills on a regular basis to fit into new jobs in a globalized and constantly changing world. 🐦

The performance of our civil servants in general leaves much to be desired.



FICTION

WE ARE ALL GOING

By NOA JONES



Looking down at the bus from my window at the Tenzin Hotel, I can see my silver suitcase on the roof rack amid all sorts of other bags; the blue tarp has not yet been roped into place. I think maybe today we are going to die. Other passengers are milling around in the debris of the narrow parking lot finding lines of morning light to stand in against the cold. I count seven dogs sleeping in a pile of damp sand, still wet from last night's thunderstorm. I've come back up to my room to double check that I haven't left anything behind and now I want to stay here. Forfeit the next leg of the journey. Order some Wai Wai noodles and watch BBC with the curtains drawn. Instead I go down and climb onto the bus. Seat number four is behind the driver by the window. The driver wears his gho as an afterthought, wrapped hastily around his hips like an apron over jeans. He is a small man, his forearm a good length shorter than my own. He has affixed a plastic rose and a picture of a lama to the sun visor. I know this lama, he is my lama's father. I have a small zip lock baggie of embalming salt from his body tucked away in a drawer somewhere. In the photo he raises his hand in blessing.

The air inside the bus smells strongly of a dirty diaper and faintly of vomit or maybe betelnut, or both. Vomit and betelnut have a similar nose—acrid, sharp, familiar. The bus pulls out of town with a groan

and soon we are on the road. The road, the only road east. The driver stops frequently, adding passengers even after all the seats are full, luggage and legs block the aisle. I turn so that I don't have to see their faces. The baby next to me sneezes in a completely relaxed manner letting the mucus run down his puckered lip. I turn from him too, not wanting to smell his baby breath. Why would you name a flower such a thing?

The driver is going very fast, hauling the steering wheel this way and that way with his short arms, frequently jamming on the breaks, which reply to his foot with a cry like a pterodactyl. As he shaves corners, bags and bodies shift side to side. With nowhere else to turn, I can only look out the window, down into the deep valleys below. The bald tires of the bus meet the gravel, grazing the disappearing edges of the road, which give way to nothingness with immediacy, dropping hundreds of feet down into the old growth jungle. I can't see the bottom. I think we may die. But we don't die.

After some time, the driver tilts his head back ever so slowly, nose to the ceiling, still speeding, and taps the contents of a soda straw onto his tongue, a brown powder like yeast. I can't tell if his eyes are on the road. This is it, I think, but this isn't it. He tosses the empty straw out the window and drives on and on. The road turns and turns again, always pocked with boulders and sink holes, tractors and mud-

slides. The old lady behind me is retching up the Radhey Radhey Cheese Balls she ate in the parking lot. We climb higher. A fog settles fast onto the road, we've plunged into a cloud and visibility doesn't reach more than a meter in front of the grill. The driver tosses an empty bag of chips out the window into the blank space. He doesn't slow down.

Through the mist appears a man crouching at the edge of the road under a filthy umbrella, his clothes are stained with asphalt oil. He catches me looking, his eyes as black as tar, then turns his back.

We heave uneasily left and right into the white nothingness until the driver slams the breaks and comes to a full and shocking stop. The bus hisses. The truck blocking our way hisses back. Vehicles creaking on the cliff, there is only room for one to pass the narrow part of the road; a landslide washed away the rest. Diesel against diesel. But our driver has to face the rules, uphill wins these battles and so we back up, inching blindly towards the precipice. No, we don't die, though it would have been easy.

The truck continues up with a honk of appreciation - all clear - and our driver toots back and pushes onto the road. But just around the bend is another truck, another stand off, only this time we're in the winning position, uphill wins. The opposing truck backs up against the chewed out mountain side and our driver puts the bus into gear, puts weight on the gas pedal, and

● **WHEN THE THIMPHU-PHUENTSHOLING HIGHWAY WAS INAUGURATED BY THE LATE PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA, MS. INDIRA GANDHI, IN 1968, THERE WERE LESS THAN 40 VEHICLES IN BHUTAN**

FICTION



The old lady behind me is now upside down, standing on the ceiling of the bus, her face is a mask, she has amazing bone structure but very bad teeth.

...does not move. The gear has slipped into neutral, it cannot pull with all the excess weight. We fishtail and then instead of accelerating we continue to slide back.

It is only now that we begin gently into our deadly descent and my feeling transforms into a knowing: We are going to die.

What did Rinpoche tell me when I asked him hypothetically what I should think if and when my bus went off a cliff, because I did ask him once, because I do live in this part of the world where things like this happen and now it's happening. He said "remember the guru" so that is what I should do now as the trees swipe my window like car wash mops and the baby leaves the arms of his mother beside me. A packet of biscuits floats past my ear. I wonder what the rescue team will think of the brassiere I wore today. This is not what I

should be thinking. I should be remembering the guru, remember? He sits on a tiger skin. Gravity is relentless and insane. Am I supposed to remember the guru as he was to me, a friend and a teacher, on the throne, at a coffee shop? Do I remember him as a man or as a thangka painting? A shoe moves past. A cell phone. A bottle of mineral water. How big should the guru be? Real sized or above my head. Or maybe inside my heart or maybe I should remember that after all I am the guru. The old lady behind me is now upside down, standing on the ceiling of the bus, her face is a mask, she has amazing bone structure but very bad teeth, red stained nubs, I can see them all. Do I remember him as a deity? Or do I remember the words he spoke to me? Is this a trick? Will this be my last thought? ...Or will this? ...Or will this? Fear of this nature is known to me only in dreams which reminds me that sometimes in dreams I can wake up when I remember it's a dream. I know this is not a dream but maybe if I remember something else, it will transform into a dream. Remember the guru. Is it as easy as that?

There is blue sky under the tires. The driver's bowling shirt is caught by the branch of a tree and then he is gone, out the window. There are no birds in the trees. They must have seen us coming and flown away, up, which is now my down as we go down. I wonder if my suitcase is safe. Who will go through all of my stuff? Fear is replaced by sadness. My youngest sister will be



● **TODAY, BHUTAN HAS MORE THAN 50,000 REGISTERED VEHICLES. THERE ARE MORE THAN 60,000 REGISTERED LICENSE HOLDERS, OF WHICH APPROXIMATELY 6,000 ARE WOMEN**

so sad, probably the saddest of all my family to get the phone call. What will be the chain of information? Who will find out first? The sadness is replaced by curiosity. The Bhutanese system of scrupulous identity checks does have one benefit. They will know for sure I was on the bus after the check point. They will call the CSO and the CSO will contact the board and the board will contact Rinpoche and he will know how to get to my family through one of my friends, Lynn or Lowell, and either of them would be good people to break the news to my family. To say, less bluntly, she's dead at the bottom of a jungle in a bus. They'll call on the phone at whatever ungodly hour GMT minus plus plus minus. Minus me. Minus me. I am no longer. I wish I had practiced more because this is the real thing and I am simply not ready. 🐦

Noa Jones is a writer of fiction and creative non-fiction. She has been volunteering for Lhomon Education, a CSO based in Bhutan, since 2010.



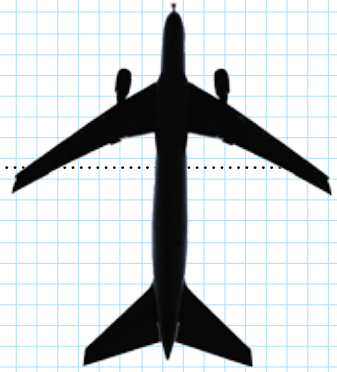
G2C

The Government To Citizen Services in Samdrupjongkhar hasn't made any progress even after a year of being launched.



Tshewang Nidup

Commonly known as the Condom Man, for receiving the SAARC Champion Award 2012 for his efforts to raise awareness on HIV/AIDS.



The national airline experienced a 9% growth in passenger traffic in 2012 compared to the previous year. Drukair ferried 181,427 passengers last year, compared to 166,264 in 2011.



Bhutan Telecom Ltd,

For reducing Druknet broadband prices for internet users by 40%, beginning June.



Private Schools

10 of the 13 private higher secondary schools were placed at the bottom ten when ranked for their overall pass percentage.



About 74,000 more Bhutaneese have joined the list over the years to be eligible to make their votes count for the second National Council election, scheduled for April 23. That is an increase by more than 19 % compared to the first Council election in 2008.



Tashi InfoComm has reduced its mobile Internet rates from this month.



Little Champs

Producers of the TV reality show, for not giving prizes to the little winners even after declaring the results a few months back.



Bhutan Education City

For being recognised as the "third best" Public Private Partnership project in the East Asia, Pacific, and South Asia region by the International Finance Corporation.



Petrol prices fell by more than Nu 2 a litre last month following a drop in India.



As Punatsangchu I, II and Mangdechu Hydropower projects are commissioned in 2016 -17, Bhutan's GDP will have grown from Nu 95.06 billion now to Nu 227 billion in 2020.

WHAT'S **NEW**

Trends

KEY

Brand Where to buy Contact



• Ori Flame perfumes for women
 • The Hanger, Motithang # 17650198

NU.
1,880

• Varsity Jacket for men
 • Your Choice, near Lugar Theatre # 17757751



NU.
1,890



NU.
1,680

• Formal Korean trousers for women
 • Your Choice, near Lugar Theatre # 17757751



NU.
3,399

• Rayban shades for women
 • The Hanger, Motithang # 17650198

NU.
480

• iphone case
 • The Hanger, Near Motithang # 17650198



NU.
2,980

• Nike sneakers
 • Your Choice # 17757751

WHAT 'S YOUR QUIRK

DJ Phuntsho Wangdi, popularly known as Dj Pee

Age. 28. **Where are you from?** I am from Mongar but I live in Thimphu. **How would you define life?** Like the line from the movie Forrest Gump, Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you are going to get. **What are you eating now?** When hunger strikes, I eat anything and everything. **What do you hope to achieve?** I just want to be a good and compassionate human being. **Entertainment to you?** Belting out numbers on the dance floor that people enjoy dancing to. **How do you define love?** Love is unconditional yet complicated. **Your interests?** Music and of course, my family. **Your profession?** I am a cultural guide by profession because I love interacting with people. But, I enjoy dj'ing as music with its rhythm and beats touches my heart. **One thing you'd like to change about yourself?** I am comfortable in my skin. So I don't think I'd change anything. In other words, I am perfect. **Your favorite celebrity?** If I could pass off as one, it would be me. **Like?** Being around people. **Dislike?** People with bloated egos. **Quirk?** I feel weird when guys my age call me Achu.



KNOW YOUR FOOD

Misconceptions of MSG

The word MSG, in relation to food, is not very welcome and has bad connotations. But have we ever questioned the so-called “facts” that create MSG’s bad reputation? It turns out it all dates back to a letter to the editor of a magazine called the “New England Journal of Medicine” around the late 60’s to early 70’s. The letter came from a doctor who himself didn’t have any expertise in monosodium glutamate chemistry.

He did however notice that friends and associates of his would go to Chinese restaurants and have a similar collection of symptoms such as; having headaches, being flushed and other feverish symptoms and discomforts. He called this, the “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome”. From here the Media picked up on this and it turned from myth to supposed fact almost overnight. What many of us don’t know is that MSG is a naturally occurring ingredient in many foods. Tomatoes, Seaweed, Parmesan cheese, fermented foods, mushrooms and even human breast milk, all have some of the highest contents of Monosodium Glutamate (what MSG stands for) naturally found in them, which makes them so delicious and creates taste. MSG is essentially a salt, both contain sodium that gives salts the salty taste and like salt it stimulates our



appetites and enhances flavors of foods. If you were to look at MSG in an extracted form, it looks like tiny crystals much like salt. People think that MSG is not naturally found. However a lot, if not all the table salt we use is heavily denaturated and processed.

The way MSG is extracted from certain foods is through processes such as drying, aging or fermenting. Microbes from food enzymes develop through these processes into amino acids and glutamic acids. Glutamates then get together with these acids to create the umami or MSG flavor.

Still today many incidents



MSG is a naturally occurring ingredient in many foods.

have occurred where people have stated that MSG has caused, headaches, palpitations, chest pains, sickness, allergic reaction and other symptoms. However studies about these problems and their relation to MSG have been going on since the late 1900’s and still there is lack of proof to prove that MSG actually is responsible for these negative symptoms from consuming it even in large amounts. It is unfortunate that such a remarkable ingredient has been exploited and demoted to this idea of a cheap and dangerous flavor booster. 🐦

By **JAMSEL TSHERING GYALTSHEN**

PROFILE

THE CHALLENGES OF BEING IN THE CIA

By SONAM ONGMO

It is 11:00 pm and Jamsel has just finished up from café Boulud on the Upper East Side of New York City. It has been a long day and he is looking forward to going home downtown where he is boarding with family friends. He enters the subway armed as usual with his music and his black bag, labeled CIA, which holds sharp knives of different shapes and sizes. The bag of knives is something he must have with him at all times, on the job. If Jamsel had been at the Café just to enjoy a nice meal, that would've been fun, but since 11:00 that afternoon, like most afternoons, Jamsel Tshering Gyaltshen who is studying to become a Chef, had been toiling away, scrubbing, scraping, washing and prepping in the kitchen at one of the world's most famous cafés. It belongs to internationally renowned French Chef and restaurateur Daniel Boulud.

"Café Boulud wasn't my first choice for an internship," says Jamsel, who was more interested in working at one of the Asian-Fusion kitchens in Manhattan. "I was a little disappointed at first because Asian food is what I am really interested in, but knowing who Boulud is, I was glad to have this prestigious opportunity." Although Jamsel, 20, formally began his culinary journey two years ago when he joined the CIA – Culinary Institute of America,

the world's premier culinary college based in Hyde Park New York, his love affair with food began as a child. "My mother is a great cook and I saw how happy she was, doing what she was doing. It wasn't a job for her. I spent a lot of time with her in the kitchen and saw what a joy it was for her," he said fondly remembering his mother, miles away at the other end of the world.

"That was the catalyst for me, watching her develop her passion into a business. She made beautiful cakes that were in great demand, and she eventually opened the Art Café. I realized you could make a living from doing something you enjoy. This progression really inspired me."

Working in the kitchen is not the choice for many young men and women in Bhutan. After all where is the "glamour" in such a profession? Many would prefer to be sitting behind a desk, attending meetings, giving orders, or pushing papers. At a time when "important" desk jobs are becoming scarce, few have branched out to explore other lines of professions, and in this Jamsel might just be the very first to pave the path for Chefs in his generation. Sometimes though, Jamsel has wondered why he didn't take the easier path. "There were many times when I felt like giving up because it is really hard work. Sometimes it gets too much."



JAMSEL T. GYALTSHEN



PROFILE

But, he admits, it is an “eye-opening” experience and this is what he was made to do. “You have to start at the bottom because it is important to have an understanding about every part of the job, how it feels to do that work, and how things work. If you don’t know the basics, you can’t become better. It teaches you to appreciate what people in these positions are doing, and also about the dignity of labor,” he said.

At the Café Boulud the pressure was high. If anyone is familiar with the restaurant scene in New York, they might understand the stressful nature of the job given the standards and the demand for precision and quality. You don’t even have to know New York, you could watch Television Programs like Hell’s Kitchen, Kitchen Nightmares, Master Chef and Gordon Ramsey to get an idea of the competitive and stressful nature of the food business altogether.

“They are very hard on you and drive you to the edge. There is no time to sit around. You are on the move all the time and we have to achieve much in a small amount of time,” said Jamsel who on morning shifts works from 6:00 am to 5:00 pm. The tasks were grueling. He had to scrub the floor, clean the refrigerator, the countertops till they were spotless, do the dishes, prep food and keep things ready for the master chef. This is what you do in training, a long way before you get to become the master chef giving orders. But he was getting used to the grueling side of this. Back at the Culinary Institute he had to wake up at 3:00 am for breakfast classes. “We’d get to the class at 3:30 am to start baking and preparing items for breakfast. We’d prep everything from scratch. Students are assigned to different tasks and stations, some get pastries

to prepare, some bread, eggs, pancakes etc. We are taught to clean as we go and to organize. This way we work faster and more efficiently. The classes change every semester, moving to lunch and then dinner. And if it were just that, it wouldn’t be so bad. “They yell at you, put you down, and make you feel inferior. It is not being racist or discriminatory. It is just the nature of the job.” Sounds like the disciplinary aspect of being a Chef is as tough as training to be a spy in the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency).

According to Jamsel it is something they are taught and slowly get used to. “Even at school they break you down to test how much pressure and stress you can handle. They insult you and constantly make you feel like you are not meant for the job. But they also build you up and motivate you. They are extremely negative, but once in a while they throw in a positive comment like a gold nugget and you savor it. It makes you feel really great, like you’ve achieved a lot, and you work hard for that. The teachers tell us that people will be mean and will make you feel like dirt, but they tell us these people will be the teachers.” It sounds a bit like a lesson from Buddhism; that your enemies can be your best teachers?

“Some of our teachers are really mean, but it’s tough love. More than the physical aspect of it, psychologically it has been very challenging,” Jamsel says laughing; clearly indicating he now has it all under control. This was not so much the case at the beginning. Even before the course started Jamsel remembers how he became so anxious that he started getting anxiety attacks. “Although I didn’t know what to expect, I knew that it was going to be hard physically and mentally and I was going to be on my own, far away from my family. I had to go see a counselor, they have them on campus just for


this, and it was helpful.”

It is understood that the drop out rate at the CIA is always high. If you can’t withstand the pressure and stress, it is clear you are not cut out for the job. Jamsel’s class started out with 30 students, but as time went on 21 students had dropped out.

“One time at a practical exam, one of the students just fell to her knees and started crying. It was hard. She just couldn’t handle the pressure. There are always counselors who talk to the students frequently and we can go see them whenever we want.”

The course at the CIA is well rounded. It offers a Bachelor of Professional Studies degree in Culinary Arts Management, Baking and Pastry Arts Management and Culinary Sciences. It also offers an Associate in Occupational Studies degree.

The first two years students learn things like fundamentals of cooking and working in a kitchen, fabrication of meat and fish, food safety and handling, nutrition, services. The following two years are about business management.

With students from all over the world and being in the vicinity of a city that has restaurants from all over too, the CIA is an ideal place for young food innovators and artists to create and explore new ideas and tastes. “I think that Asian food is under-rated and not given the appreciation it deserves. This is not only in the west, but even in Asia.” After his stint at the CIA, Jamsel plans to spend time traveling in South and South-East Asia and studying the various foods. He hopes to come up with ideas that he can incorporate into the Bhutanese menu. “Generally Bhutanese people aren’t very adventurous, they like to stick to their comfort zone when it comes to food. Maybe I can change that,” he said. 

RECIPE

Thinggay Fries

Ingredients

Potatoes – peeled and cut to desired shape and size -1 ½ kgs.

Soy bean, Sunflower or canola oil – enough to cover potatoes when cooking.

Salt and pepper – to taste.

Cilantro – chopped, about a handful.

Garlic – 2 to 3 cloves, finely chopped.

Thinggay – crushed as desired.

Chilli Powder – ¾ tbsp.

Lemons – juiced, ½ or 1 ea.

(Makes around 10 servings)



Method

Cut and peel potatoes to desired shape and size and hold them in cold water to prevent discoloring (pat dry them before adding them to the oil to prevent the oil from splattering).

Heat oil to 300 degrees F, once there, add potatoes and fry them till they are slightly tender but not completely cooked and have barely any color. This ensures proper color and texture without having them become overly greasy and burnt.

Drain them and set them on paper towels to remove excess oil. You can now hold the potatoes till you are ready to cook them. These can be refrigerated for several hours and even kept frozen for up to a month.

Once you are ready turn the heat up on the oil to about 375 degrees F and put the potatoes back in. Fry them till they are golden brown and or floating on the oil surface. Make sure to stir them around at least once so they cook evenly and don't stick to each other.

Once done remove them and shake off excess oil and put them on paper towels to remove more oil. While still relatively hot add your salt and pepper, lemon juice, garlic, thing-gay, chilli powder and cilantro in that order, tossing between ingredients.

Serve immediately. 🐦

By JAMSEL TSHERING GYALTSHEN



REVIEW RESTAURANT



WHERE

Changzamtok, near Green Mart

SPECIAL

International & Chinese cuisine

TIMING

9 am – 10:00 pm

CONTACT

17441627/77109930

Zhay-Go Express

Zhay-Go Express is a quaint restaurant with an extensive menu and modest setup. Although the name, 'Zhay-Go', leads us to expect Bhutanese food, the restaurant offers a mixture of international and Chinese fusion cuisine.

Apart from the usual burgers and sandwiches, they serve a range of Italian and Indonesian dishes, which is a pleasant deviation from the general restaurant food found in Thimphu. The unique and succulent flavors paired with good presentation of the dishes left me very impressed. However, I must add that like many restaurants in Thimphu, the service could do with a fair bit of improvement in terms of being quick.

Another minor setback for the restaurant is the unavailability of many items on the menu. Perhaps the owners got a little overzealous or ambitious? It should be understood, especially, if you are entering the restaurant business that standards could be judged or questioned by offering items that you cannot provide or serve. Sometimes an item or two may not be offered because of the unavailability of the ingredients, but when more than two cannot be offered, it is disappointing for customers and bad for business.



THE DINING AT ZHAY-GO EXPRESS

Although the name, Zhay-Go, leads us to expect Bhutanese food, the restaurant offers a mixture of international and Chinese fusion cuisine.

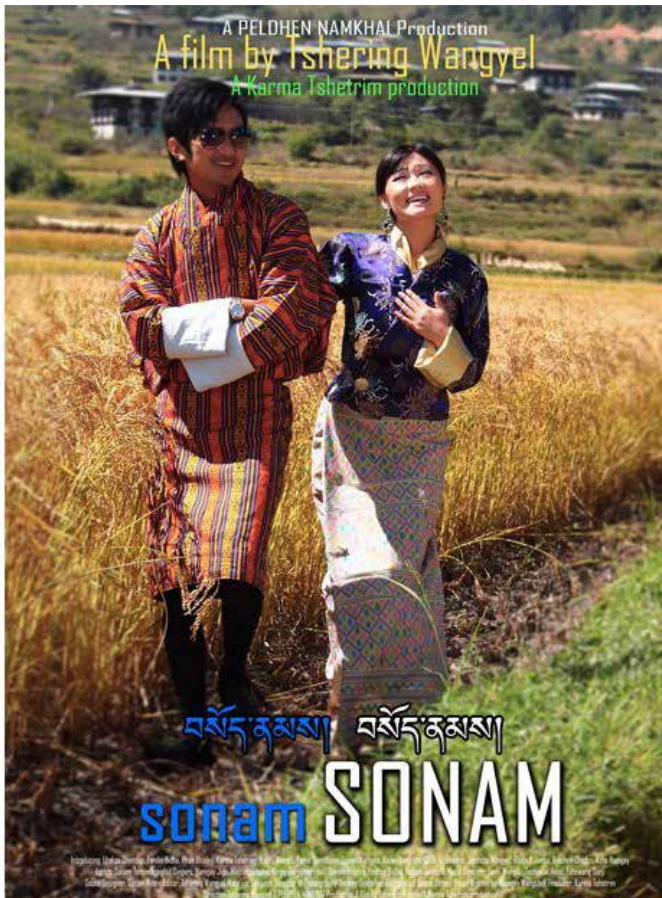


If the restaurant were to improve on these minor glitches, I would gladly become a regular and also recommend the restaurant to others. Zhay-Go Express, located in Changzamtog next door to Green Mart, is also within a reasonable price range and definitely gives you your money's worth. 🐦

By LEXO THOBGYAL



REVIEW MOVIE



DIRECTOR

Tshering Wangyel

CAST

Lhakpa Dhendup, Tandin Bidha, Phub Thinley, Karma Tshering, Kinley Wangdi, Pema Sambhava

Synopsis

The plot revolves around two different individuals who are brought together by circumstances leading to a truly heartwarming romance

sonam & SONAM

Sonam and Sonam is a film that revolves around the lives of the two main characters Sonam Tenzin played by debutante Lhakpa Dhendup, and Sonam Dema, by well-known Tandin Bidha. The protagonists are vastly different in personalities but are brought together by circumstances leading to a truly heartwarming romance.

The movie, which is very simple in its plot, is like most Bhutanese movies that have yet to mature in terms of its story content.



Sonam Tenzin is someone who has been indulged all his life and is, therefore, arrogant, immature, and selfish and has never taken on any responsibilities. His father wants him to face reality and become a responsible person and offers Sonam a job at his company but Sonam refuses, which causes further damage to the father-son relationship.

Sonam Dema, on the other hand, is an honest, hardworking and independent woman. She works for Sonam Tenzin's father, who is very impressed by her diligence. Orphaned at a young age she has learned to strive on

her own and is very much the opposite of Sonam Tenzin.

When the two first meet, they are off to a rough start but soon Sonam Tenzin is convinced that he is in love with Sonam Dema. He is determined to pursue her irrespective of the fact that she does not reciprocate his feelings. With time and a lot of effort from his side, Sonam Dema is finally able to see the side of him that is loving and compassionate.

His love for her changes him into a better man. He turns over a new leaf and even gets a job. Soon after, they get married. Everything seems perfect and the



The director, Tshering Wangyel, with actress Tandin Bidha

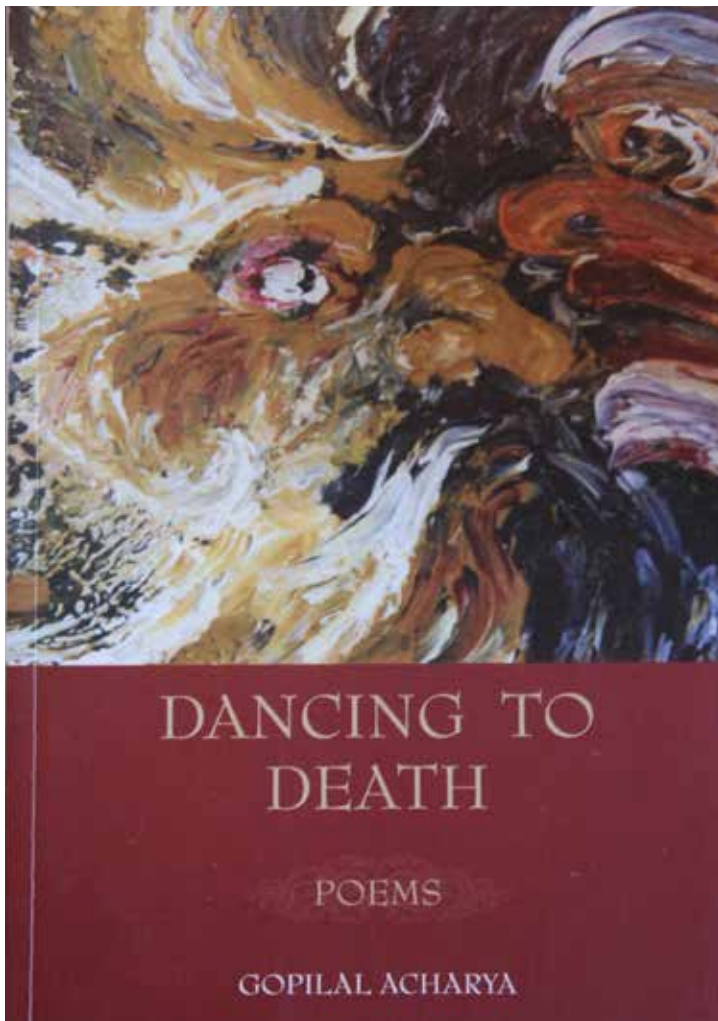
two cannot be happier.

The movie, which is very simple in its plot, is like most Bhutanese movies that have yet to mature in terms of its story content. The storyline is sometimes confusing and even dragged out. It is definitely not one of Tshering Wangyel's best works. However, Lhakpa Dhendup as a new comer to the Bhutanese silver screen has made an impressive debut. Tandin Bidha is equally good. If the movie doesn't delight, the soundtrack should. It features the song "Tharingsa" which was an instant hit with the public. 🐦

By LEXO THOBYAL



REVIEW BOOK



PRICE
Nu. 300

AVAILABLE AT
DSB Book Store, Thimphu

There is a certain zen quality to most of the poems that take up a fleeting, ineffable sensation and weave a texture of memory around it.

Many people will tell you that no one makes a living by poetry. And, yet, one should add, we live by poetry. *Dancing to Death*, a hauntingly beautiful collection of poems by Gopilal Acharya, an accomplished Bhutanese editor and writer, is a verse-memoir of love, death, and perhaps, the death of love.

There are 49 poems in the 70 pages of the book, which has as its cover paintings by the acclaimed Bhutanese artist Kama Wangdi.

If you have ever listened to Leonard Cohen or Tom Waits or Bob Dylan; if you have ever read Murakami's fiction, if you have watched movies by French auteurs or Bergman or Wong Kar-Wai; if you have delighted in the verses of Blake, Whitman, Yeats, Rimbaud, Celan, Carver, Rich, or The Beats -- you will like these poems.

The poet is a lone existential nihilist 'struggling against the surrounding universe, which is at once both dreary and full of desire. He is in love with the love that will not let him be: "even

as I slave / to be a willing lover to an unwilling woman in *Desertion* or 'Come back, she surely will / Come back to me, she never would' in *The Departure*.

He cannot help but be torn between a resignation and a renewal; between his feelings for his parents and his desperation to retain a hold on his self as the reality of ageing and the changing seasons take a toll on him : 'When time becomes a scary movement' in *A Dead Life*.

His cup of morning tea is 'strange' as he remembers the broken and worn-out past, his whisky is almost a metaphor throughout the book. In the poem *Song of Experience* the poet has no answers to the questions posed to him. He himself wants to question others but finds that in those attempts to frame his questions, he remains forever condemned, and ultimately, silent.

He is, above all, a brutal witness to the sordid world where the privilege and consolation of his verses seem fake in the presence of the women who chip stones by the wayside, or the little 'retard' boy who plays in his jerry-can car with the dogs (*Privileges* and *There Lives This Boy*). The poet is a cynic who is appalled by the cravenness and absurdity of human life (most beautifully explored in the Whitmanesque last poem *As I Look Around*), but the poet is also an innocent who is able to wonder at the abstraction of ideals and yearn for freedom ('After all, that is how / patriots are born - made' in *Freedom Song*), and ask why life could not be simpler ('Say like a cow grazing in a meadow' in *Losing Connection*). But for all the nuanced perplexity of life, the final voice of the poet is one that affirms life, that sings of its resilience.

The poems evoke an unmistak-

able sense of passing time and explore the futility and necessity of seeking happiness in our mortal lives.

The title poem 'Dancing to Death' is arresting in its imagery - the trees resemble old inkpots from within which come forth endless birdsongs, history is written on their trunks and it is for us to ascertain their roots, the night of the fireflies is powder gold and then with a shiver at an old thought, it is cracked open by the moon, and while the poet's father begs the gods for forgiveness and the mother chops onion rings, the poet (in the mind of the reader, the 'you') wonders why the moon looks so high up from the mountains and so close up from the plains?

There is a deep sense of metaphysical contemplation of the rhythms of nature that continue in the face of an everyday dying ('for nature never wrote a dirge for the dead / only you and I, we wail at the grave'), and the darkness entwined with distant beauty ('but darkness was here always / and probably that distant beauty too / just the history went unwritten / and unnoticed in this part of the world').


There is a certain zen quality to most of the poems that take up a fleeting, ineffable sensation and weave a texture of memory around it (*The Call* or *I am Screwed, Too* or *37 Years* or *Calling Byron*).

The Anglo-European sensibility of romanticism in the poems is undeniable. Without seeking to be parochially appealing to a 'native' marketing that would focus on incense, lhakhangs, mountains and monks, the poems are refreshingly honest and claim influences from the larger world of imagination. The poems are rich with references to glass-seas and bloody skies (*The Sky and The Sea*), to Dante, Quixote, and Icarus, to the artist Munch (even as unstated scenes by Magritte lurk in the backdrop). The poems will reward you with references as diverse as Eusebius or Victor Pelevin

(a Roman historian theologian and a contemporary Russian novelist).

The gems are scattered evenly through the book - there are 'dreams dreaming each other in a vile conspiracy' (*Maimed*; something that reminded me of Milan Kundera's novel *Life is Elsewhere*), the guilt that persists like the hair on your body (*Getting in Mood*), the rain that spies like a filthy voyeur on the lovers indoors in the summer (*That Summer*), sun-burnt dreams peeling off badly in the night sky (*Raving*). And, one can only imagine how it feels to 'lick the smithereens of our forsaken dreams / from the teaspoons and the coffee cups' (*Game Players*).

Erato, the muse of lyrical poetry, has certainly visited the poet of this collection in various guises, and left him lingering somewhere between the 'shortage of breath' and the 'excess of life' (*Beneath the Skin*). In the poem *Desertion*, there are the telling words: 'Such brave lunacy lies in sanctuary now'. Indeed, for the most part it does. But, look carefully, and there remains the comradeship of some brave lunatics who are still around: 'To erase the emptiness and / unveil the latticework of life's miracles' (*Don't Ever Ask Me How*).

We suffer to narrate the pleasures of our pains. And the worthy verses here are stunning in their ability to convert the poet's pain into our pleasure. Do read! 

By Dr NITASHA KAUL

The writer is a London-based novelist, poet and scholar. Her novel Residue was shortlisted for the Man Asian Literary Prize in 2009.



Play fair, abide by the rules, the Chief Election Commissioner, **Dasho Kunzang Wangdi**, urges political parties and candidates in this candid interview with *The Raven*.



Q. There is very little time for new political parties and NC candidates to prepare for the upcoming elections, and for voters to familiarize themselves with the candidates. In such a scenario, even the media hasn't been up to the task, given the limited time frame, to educate people about candidates or parties. Isn't this a great dis-service to the people? And, doesn't this hamper the process for fair and better election results?

A. Election to the National Assembly is yet to be announced. Therefore; it would be incorrect to say that there is very little time for new political parties. As to the NC candidates their campaign will start only after the end of the month of March. The campaign time provided under the Electoral Laws will be more than necessary for a good political party and candidate to prepare for and contest the upcoming elections. The general public have been put through a round of general voter education. Another round of specifics Voter Education and Information is being conducted in all Dzongkhags. Once an election is announced, Parties and Candidates will have several opportunities to interact with the voters. Every such effort we are hopeful would contribute to our conduct of free, fair and better election results.

We expect the media will also rise to the occasion to supplement and complement the concerted efforts made by the ECB. Every Party and candidate will be able to reach out to the voters and in the process help educate people about which candidate or party to vote [for].

Q. The general opinion is that the requirement of a university degree is curtailing participatory democracy as it automatically excludes a huge pool of potential aspirants, who may not have a degree. By placing that criteria, it has taken away the opportunity from semi-educated or maybe even illiterate people who are interested, to run for office. In many countries, educated leaders have failed their people and those with no college degrees, like Evo Morales in Bolivia, have been elected as presidents or prime ministers. If a person with little or no formal education can prove his/her worth and voters believe in him/her, shouldn't that person be allowed to contest?

A. No one should misunderstand that the post of Member of Parliament (MP) is an equal opportunity employment scheme. It would be belittling the importance of Parliament and Council of Ministers to equate as affirmative action programme where any

unemployed and under-qualified receives opportunity to be employed. The Parliamentary Election is rather a process of selection of most qualified and competent individual possessing leadership attributes with good track record meriting leadership positions in the highest level of national level decision-making and law-making position. Hence, it has become important that our election system elects persons who possess at least a formal university degree besides other positive attributes of leadership. It will be wrong to generalize that educated leaders have failed their people and leaders with no



Any parent who spend money to educate their children to get good jobs to consider running for parliament as a substitute for employment scheme may find themselves disappointed.

educational backgrounds are rare exceptions that cannot be taken and applied as a rule. In any case, if it were to be pursued further, it must be accepted that the expenditure on education as a waste of resources. Why would one think that parents are willing to go to any length to educate their children? How could one know who is fit or not for a job without adopting a selection process when even an opening for a subordinate position these days require degree certificates?

Q. Understood that it is not an equal opportunity employment scheme. The misconception that securing a seat in parliament is a way of getting employed is indeed something that exists. And yes, education is important. However, my question was really about how inclusive our democracy is. People have complained that the officials they elected to office, all with college degrees, were largely interested in their own benefits rather than representing the people. They have proven in some ways that their degrees don't really make them better than the uneducated person. Parents spend money so that their children can learn good things and values and hope they get good jobs. So running for parliament shouldn't be treated as an employment scheme should it?

A. "Inclusive" in an election means that not a single eligible and interested voter is excluded from being registered as a voter. In fact, the European Election Observation Team concluded that our first parliamentary election in 2008 was "inclusive". There is no doubt that why the Secondary Parliamentary election would not be inclusive too. As to the complain that the officials those

elected to office with college degrees, were largely interested in their own benefits rather than representing the people since the second parliamentary election 2013 is already on, and on 23rd April the people of Bhutan will go to polls to elect the MP for their area for the National Council, it is an opportunity for each voter to assess his/her MP. While those who performed could be voted back to power any other who with degrees did not really make them better than the uneducated person should be voted out of power. Any parent who spend money to educate their children to get good jobs to consider running for parliament as a substitute for employment scheme may find themselves disappointed.

Q. Religious people aren't allowed to vote or participate in politics, and that is understandable. But, when parliamentarians bring up religion or justify certain legislations based on religion (like the health minister did in the National Assembly on the Tobacco Act) don't you feel that the rules are not being followed or respected? And, is the Election Commission doing anything to remind candidates and parties about this issue?

A. First, I believe that the tobacco issue was argued more on the basis of the tobacco being a health hazard than on religious ground. The duty of the Election Commission is to conduct free and fair election and it must be the responsibility of voters to require their elected representatives to address such issues. They can write or talk to the MPs during their constituency visits.

Q. Our system allows horse-trading, switching party loyalty, after the primary round. Would this not impact the parties that lose in the primary round if they are to continue as public



The duty of the Election Commission is to conduct free and fair elections and it must be the responsibility of voters to require their elected representatives to address such issues.

institutions?

A. Nowhere in the laws there is a provision that allows horse-trading, switching party loyalty, except that there is provision that, after the Primary Round, a person can join another political party provided he/she is relieved by the party to which he/she resigns and belonged at the time of Primary Round and membership is accepted by the Party which qualifies to contest the General Elections. This is allowed with the objective of not denying a preferred individual to a particular electorate. So the Nation has no cause to worry that such a practice will have place in Bhutanese electoral institutions and practices.

The Election Commission will not allow exodus or mass replacement of candidates listed in the Letter of Intent of any Party nor would a Party betray its own principles, values and ideology for mere short-term narrow electoral gains. Therefore, there is no question of Party coalitions or horse-trading.

Q. In your opinion, was it correct on the part of Prime Minister Jigmi Y. Thinley to say that the National Council was part of the de facto opposition along with the

media in his recent State of the Nation Address? What is the ECB's view on this?

A. I have no comment on the correctness. As to the ECB's view on the role of the National Council, we expect that it will exercise its constitutionally prescribed mandate, which may at times appear to some to be in conflict or in disagreement with the views of others. It cannot necessarily be taken to mean that they are playing the role of an Opposition.

Q. Was it fair for the incumbent NC members wishing to re-contest when they had to resign without benefits because of systemic fault lines? Weren't they at the losing end?

A. Parliament enacts laws and all laws are expected to be so enacted that there is fairness and correctness in laws. Rule of law requires uniform application and implementation of the Laws. There is a procedure in place for amendment but unless and until amended, the laws are binding on all alike.

Q. How do international observers help conduct a free and fair election? Who are we expecting this time?

A. The international observers do serve as reassurance and reinforces our observation arrangement put in place. It must be known that when an election is conducted it is conducted to ensure that there is fair play, justice and bring reliable outcome. We are not sure who and which countries and organizations would wish to observe our election but we would be happy to welcome those interested.

Q. In the aftermath of the 2008 elections, 'apolitical' civil servants were accused of having played a 'political' role on the day of the elections? Although

this couldn't be explicitly proved, do you think civil servants, as the most literate lot, are able to sway their rural cousins? Do you believe that civil servants called the shots in 2008?

A. As you yourself say, there is no hard evidence for such accusations. On our part we feel that civil servants, as the most literate lot, may be able to provide advice if asked by their homefolks but they cannot campaign, attend or indicate in a support or criticism of a Party or Candidate as an "apolitical" entity. We are convinced that if the electorates were not coerced or induced or their secret ballot violated, who they consult and on what basis they consult and make their decision is their fundamental

right. We would only expect that a civil servant as apolitical persons would live by the relevant code of conduct and ethics and carry only lawful actions.

Q. Why do Civil Servants have to resign to join politics? Doesn't this discourage young competent people from running for office? Those who have jobs are worried that if they run and lose they will lose their jobs, so we largely see people who are incompetent, on the verge of losing their jobs, or those who have no jobs, seeking office. As a result don't you think becoming a politician is increasingly being seen as a good employment alternative? Will the election commission or the





We have pledged collectively to offer a perfect and corruption free election. One that no entity can undermine our efforts or integrity. A free and fair election that conforms to all the norms.

government ever reconsider changing this law that reduces the country's chances for good candidates?

A. Civil service has been declared as per the laws to “apolitical”. Thus a Civil Servant who decides to run for election is required to resign to join politics. Given the past experience and the increasing number of mid and senior position civil servants joining National Council Elections and party politics it appears that this restriction has not discouraged competent people opting to run for elected office. I advise that those who are not confident that they will win but may lose their job should leave only at a favourable time. Those who value their current jobs that if they run should opt out from contesting elections. It will be a mistake to conclude from past experience that people who are incompetent, on the verge of losing their jobs, or those who have no jobs only seek office. Becoming a politician is increasingly seen as an opportunity to assume important decision making positions in Bhutanese Parliament

and governance. The Bhutanese law ensures particularly with the State financing of Parliamentary Elections attract educated and qualified persons as candidates. We, therefore, do not ever see the need for either the Election Commission or the Royal Government to ever reconsider changing the law.

Q. A committed bureaucracy is the bedrock of an elected executive. In Bhutan, bureaucracy constitutes the so-called ‘apolitical’ civil servants, and yet bureaucrats draft the policies and bills to be tabled in the parliament. How does a political system manage this paradox, especially when you have apolitical servants serving political masters?

A. In the system or the world of good governance many actors are required and each one is expected to play the game as per rules. As you have put it the civil service as a committed bureaucracy is the bedrock for an elected executive and has to render the professional duties to help his/her political master fulfill its pledges to the electors. Bhutanese bureaucracy like bureaucrats elsewhere will also assist in drafting of policies and bills to be tabled in parliament by elected post holders. The Constitution and relevant laws help each one not to cross bounds and limits. It mutually helps accomplishment of collective goals and targets. Many in Politics coexist and help each other manage this paradox, especially when an apolitical servant has to serve political masters. Remember a bureaucrat serves a political master decided by the electorate and for a fixed term only. Therefore, the political master is the post and not just the person who may come and go.

Q. What kind of election are you

looking forward to this time around, especially for the Lower House given that there are five parties?

A. We have pledged collectively to offer a perfect and corruption free election. One that no entity can undermine our efforts or integrity. A free and fair election that conforms to all the norms of a good election, outcome accepted unquestionably and the Nation provided with a Parliament worth its name. The multiparty participation is to be reckoned as the sign of Bhutanese democracy taking sound roots and gaining vibrancy. A positive development.

Q. What lessons has the Election Commission learned from the first elections and in the past five years of democratic governance?

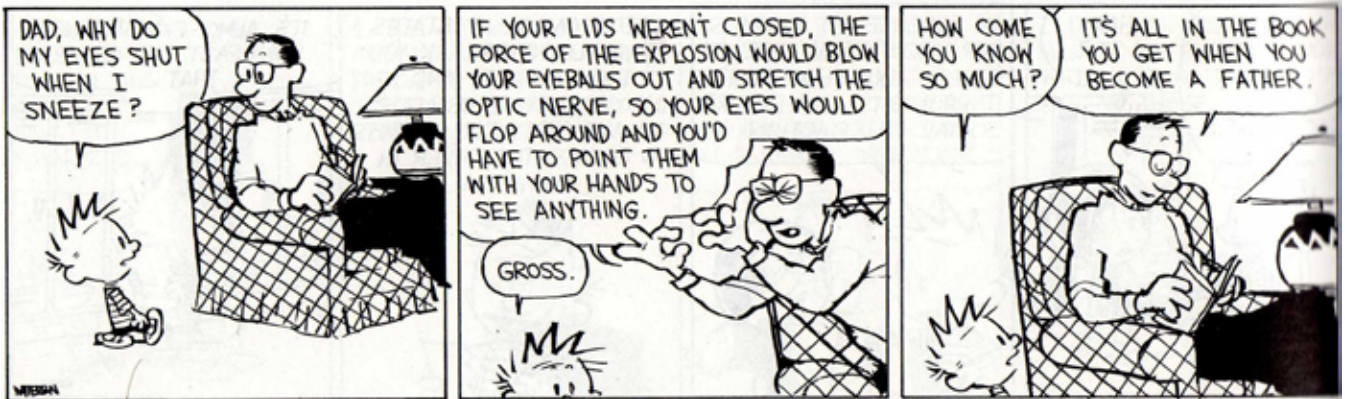
A. The Election Commission has learnt from the first elections and five years of democratic governance that above all democracy can be homegrown and given the political will any country can graduate to be a well-functioning democracy. The election management body is now grown into a system that can shoulder its mandate successfully no matter what the odds.

Q. Civil societies are an integral part of a functioning democracy. However, Bhutan's civil society is still at its infancy. How will this affect a budding democratic culture?

A. Civil societies are as in any democracy an integral part of a functioning democracy. Bhutan's civil societies though still at their infancy show promise to positively contribute in promotion of a budding democratic culture: some directly and others indirectly within the parameters allowed by the laws governing such entities. 🐦

LEISURE

Calvin & Hobbes



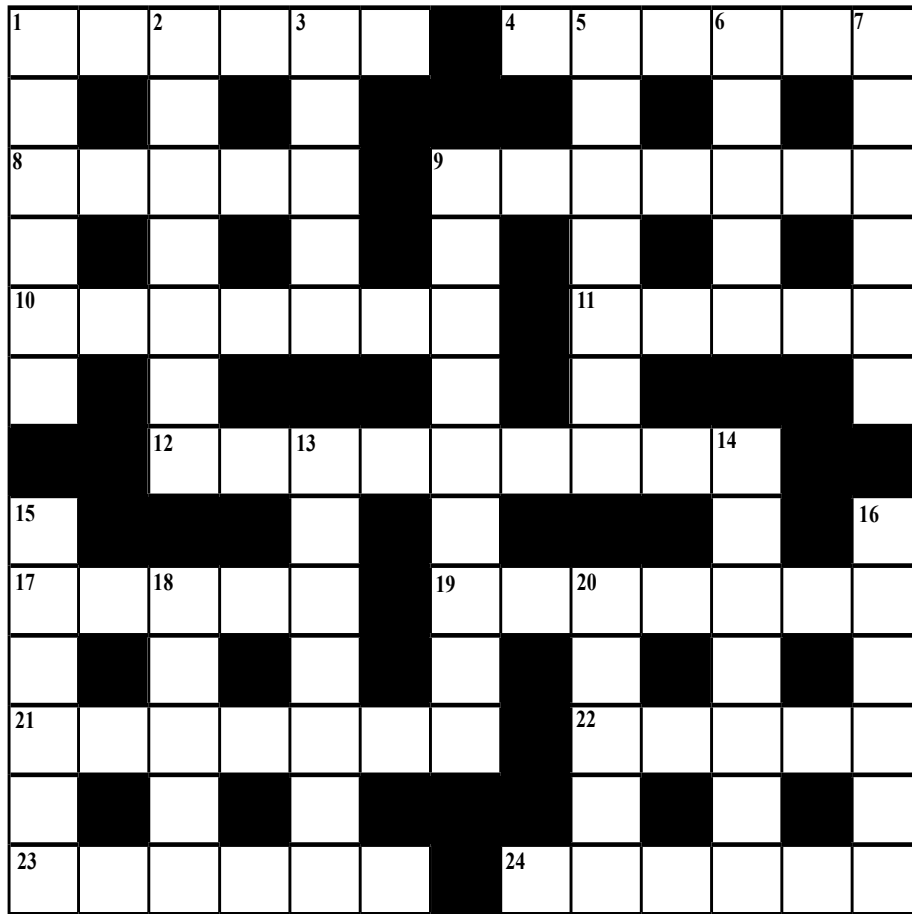
Beau Peep



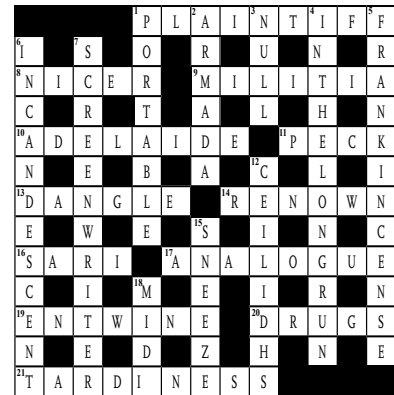
Beetle Bailey



QUICK CROSSWORD



Last Month's Solution



Solution Next Month

Across

- 1 (Formally) with this (6)
- 4 Saw eye to eye (6)
- 8 Proposition assumed to be self-evident (5)
- 9 Mooring post — traffic restriction device (7)
- 10 Brother or sister (7)
- 11 Supple (5)
- 12 Good-for-nothing (9)
- 17 Small amphibians (5)
- 19 Avenger (anag) — chase (7)
- 21 Split hairs (7)
- 22 Devil (5)
- 23 High regard (6)
- 24 Lethal (6)

Down

- 1 Gruff (6)
- 2 Polychromatic arc (7)
- 3 1942 Disney film (5)
- 5 Northern part of ancient Palestine (7)
- 6 Precise (5)
- 7 Evaded (6)
- 9 Important person (slang) (3,6)
- 13 Comical (7)
- 14 Bladderwrack, for example (7)
- 15 Unlike anything else (6)
- 16 Period of one's greatest success (6)
- 18 Spare tyre location? (5)
- 20 Blunder (5)

LIVING WITH HIV

At the time Pema Dorji was diagnosed as HIV positive, he was a young man in his prime living in Samdrup Jongkhar. Married with two children, he had never heard of AIDS or HIV and wasn't even aware of how it spread or how one could contract it. This is his story.

At a glance Pema Dorji is your average Bhutanese, living life like any other Bhutanese man would. Going to office daily, married and with a three-year-old child, he appears to have a normal life with family and friends, whom he socializes with regularly. But what differentiates Pema from the other Bhutanese is his struggle with being HIV positive. Pema is one of those on the growing list of HIV cases in Bhutan.

In 2006 a World Bank report warned that although isolated geographically, Bhutan would not be impervious to HIV/AIDS, but instead, because of the increasing cross-border migration, international travel, and the behavioral risks, Bhutan could see a rapid increase in cases in coming years. It warned that with the epidemic at the early stages there was still time to stop it from spreading.

Pema, 47, contracted HIV when he was 35 years old, about 12 years ago in 2001 which was one of the worst years that Bhutan saw a spike in the number of HIV cases. World Health Organization statistics on Bhutan reveal there were stray cases totaling to less than 10 from 1993 to 1997. Between 2001 and 2002, however, there were 22 new cases detected and by 2004 there were 23 more new ones.

Pema may just be a number on these figures, but his story tells you that this is more than just about figures. It is about carelessness, about regrets, about a lack of awareness, about the attitudes of people

By LEXO THOBYAL

➔
PEMA DORJI



towards someone suffering, and about moving on and making the best of life despite this misfortune.

In 2011, on World AIDS day, a group of HIV positive Bhutanese put their past behind them and made history when they announced publicly that they were inflicted by the illness. Pema Dorji was amongst them. In some respects, something interesting happened that day, the brave decision to disclose this information to the public and put a face to this illness, transformed Bhutanese society altogether. It told the Bhutanese that it could happen to anyone, that although the illness sounded deadly, those afflicted by it deserved to be treated with respect and care, and not shunned and looked down upon.

At the time Pema was diagnosed as HIV positive he was a young man in his prime living in Samdrup Jongkhar. He was a government employee at the Dzongkhag, married with two children. But he had never heard of AIDS or HIV and wasn't even aware of how it spread or how one could contract it. And that was probably why he was careless when he had gone to India a few years earlier. At that time, attitudes and behaviors amongst the public towards this illness also happened to be like it would anywhere else in the world – one of disgrace and shame.

Pema's wife was pregnant with their third child. His wife was getting prenatal treatment at the hospital when he was approached by Doctors and told that they needed to take his blood to do some tests. This was in connection with the pregnancy, they

said. Pema complied and didn't question them. He was asked to come back a second time for more tests. A month later, he was called in for a meeting and in the presence of the Doctor and a Counselor, told he was HIV positive. But that was not just it. His wife and their unborn child were also infected. Unbeknownst to him, he and his wife had been living with HIV for a few years because his middle child, it was confirmed, had also been infected. Fortunately his oldest child had escaped this predicament.

Pema recalls feeling like his life had ended, his world collapsed. "I knew I was going to die sooner now and wondered when – tomorrow? Day after? When? It was a sickening feeling, one of hopelessness. I didn't know whom to turn to. I was ashamed. I was sick with worry for them. My poor innocent kids. What had I done to them?"

Talking to his parents or even his wife was out of the question. His wife blamed him and he could see she was distraught by it all. "There was no sleep for me after that. I couldn't talk to anyone and I didn't want to. I couldn't eat because I was sick with worry. My family was falling apart and so was my life. I felt like I was going mad.

My wife was so angry with me that she told her father and her friends. Her father in turn told everyone that I had done this to his daughter. He was a bus driver who traveled between Samdrup Jongkhar and Tashigang so within no time, everybody knew that I had been infected by this deadly virus. People whom I considered friends changed the way they looked at me and the way they



Talking to his parents or even his wife was out of the question. His wife blamed him and he could see she was distraught by it all.

treated me. Instead of getting support from these people whom I knew, I was ostracized and discriminated against. My poor wife who was so distraught and angry at me, she started drinking very heavily.

People seemed to think that there was only one way the disease could be spread, through sexual encounters, and that alone allowed people to form prejudices against people like Pema. Rumours spread that the girls he used to know or was friends with were all infected. "These were women I just knew but had never had sexual relations with. Yet they were all scared they might have contracted HIV," he said.

Living in a small town like Samdrup Jongkhar with a population of a little over 7,000 didn't make things easier. Soon everybody, including people at work, treated him like an untouchable. "If I sat on a chair, people would wipe it down or refuse to sit on it. Many refused to talk to me even."

Eventually his wife took him to court. "I know she wanted to blame me and I understood her pain. After all I was going through the same thing. But at this point, she needed more help than I did. She was drinking very heavily and I was concerned for her," Pema said, stopping to take a breath. "I wanted to be with her and the children and asked

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her, what do you want to do? Do you want the alcohol or do you want me? And she told me she preferred the alcohol. She clearly didn't want me." Three months after their divorce, Pema's wife died from alcoholism, not AIDS.

"I fought for custody of my kids because I intended to move to Thimphu where the hospital was larger and better, and my kids and I would probably receive better attention. The courts let the children decide and although they wanted to go with me in the beginning they were probably manipulated by my father-in-law, and so they decided to go with him instead. I don't know what he told them, but when a child doesn't choose his own Dad, it must have been something really bad."

Losing his wife and children made life even more unbearable, Pema said. But when his family turned on him it was the last straw. "One day I came home and found my few and only belongings – two suitcases, a blanket, a mattress and some clothes – all dumped outside the house. My parents didn't want me. They were throwing me out.

Left in the depths of his own company, alone, scared and with no one he could turn to he decided to end his life. This was his second attempt. He had tried to kill himself before by consuming rat poison, but had survived the ordeal after someone found him unconscious and took him to the hospital.

"This time I planned to hang myself on the ceiling fan. I took my kabney and kept everything ready, but decided to call my counselor in Thimphu one last time so that I could leave



a message with him. I was so distressed. My parents were treating me like I was already dead so I thought to myself, I might as well be dead. I told him 'Atah, you told me to be strong and have been very helpful, but today I have decided to leave this world for good.' I told him how I was feeling and why I was going to kill myself."

Pema's counselor was alarmed at what he was about to do and consoled him. He talked with him for a long time and convinced him that killing himself was not the way. "He told me that he would come personally to see me and that we could talk about things. It gave me some hope and he managed to talk me out of it." The counselor did visit him.

But things were still unbearable and Pema decided that maybe leaving Samdrup

↑
**Pema with
Bhutanese
actress Tshokey
Tshomo**

Jongkhar, instead of the world, would probably make things better.

In the 90's when the AIDS epidemic had taken over the U.S and people were still just learning about it, Hollywood came out with a film "Philadelphia" which was the first movie to acknowledge and address discrimination against HIV/AIDS patients and homosexuals which existed in the workplace and amongst the public. Contrary to that, it is surprising to learn that in Bhutan, while stigma and ostracism of HIV/AIDS patient did exist to a certain extent, it was instead the honorable conduct and behavior of some officials that helped change and shape the attitude of the public.

Pema wouldn't have been able to leave Samdrup Jongkhar without the support of the

overall head of the Dzongkhag. “I went to Dasho Pendhen Wangchuk, cried in front of him and told him the truth about my life. I confessed that I was HIV positive and that I could not live in Samdrup Jongkhar anymore. I told him I needed to get transferred to Thimphu.” Pema speaks highly of Dasho Pendhen Wangchuk who he said gave him his full support and empathy. Dasho Pendhen transferred him right away.

It was easy at first. With Thimphu’s population close to about 80,000, Pema got the anonymity he craved and a chance to lead the normal life he sought. People no longer pointed at him and spoke to each other in hushed tones when he passed by, they didn’t ask him personal questions because they didn’t know.

But just as things were going smoothly, a co-worker from Samdrup Jongkhar moved to Thimphu. It was bound to happen. Bhutan is a small enough place that no secrets, especially one like this, could’ve been kept once it is out there. News of Pema being infected spread again. He saw the only

chance to start a new life in a new town collapse before him. His landlord even asked him to move out of his flat, afraid that his disease would contaminate them, he said.


“I didn’t know or think at that time that such discrimination could be prosecuted. I don’t think it had ever happened in Bhutan, nor would the justice system know how to execute such a case so I went to see the Dzongda instead, but he wasn’t in. But the Dzongrab was, and I told him what the co-worker had done,” said Pema. According to him the Dzongrab summoned the co-worker and scolded him for his behavior and for trying to ruin Pema’s life. He warned him that he would lose his job if he did that.

In the mean time, Pema got the opportunity through the hospital program to meet others who had also contracted HIV. He had always thought and felt alone, but meeting the others gave him the strength to move on. They had all faced nearly the same things that he had; they were all suffering just as he was. He finally had people he could turn to, people willing to help him, and people he felt a kinship with. It seemed to make a difference.

In 2011 a group of HIV positive patients who were part of a group called, “Lhaksam,” decided to go public about their illness. Pema who was amongst them, said he felt liberated. “My mind never felt so unburdened before. My body might have been afflicted but there was nothing wrong with my mind. However, the burden of hiding that I was HIV positive was

unbearable and shameful.” By 2011 many things had changed in Bhutan and coming out from the shadows proved that it had.

The saying, there is always a tomorrow, couldn’t hold truer for Pema. He has since remarried and moved on. His second wife was someone who was there all along for him, he says. “She wanted me for who I am, and for that I am truly grateful,” he said. Unfortunately she is also HIV positive and he has a three and half-year-old son from her who hasn’t tested positive as yet. Meanwhile his other children are in school in Eastern Bhutan. He speaks to them and keeps up with their progress. “They are undergoing treatment and they seem to enjoy school.” There was a time, however, when Pema had to go and meet with the school principal and teachers because some of them had ostracized the children and made them sit separately from the others. “I went there and explained to them about our rights and that our government does not stand discrimination and ostracism. I explained to them that the health ministry was watching and that their behavior could lead to serious repercussions. It stopped and I know they are being treated well now, because my children tell me,” he said.

Today, Pema is healthy and still undergoing treatment himself. As one of the founding members of Lhaksam, a recognized NGO, he is actively involved in spreading awareness on HIV/AIDs. He will also be participating in the upcoming Tour of the Dragon bike race from Bumthang to Thimphu. 

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“This time I planned to hang myself on the ceiling fan.”

His Majesty grants land kidu in Haa



His Majesty the King granted land Kidu to 3,173 thram-holders in Haa Dzongkhag whose cases were submitted after the completion of the National Cadastral Resurvey.

The beneficiaries faced several problems like construction of houses and lhakhangs, cultivation on state land, and the omission of thram from records, as was highlighted by the Resurvey.

His Majesty said to the beneficiaries that land is of utmost importance to the people because it is a family heirloom, that it is something that gives people roots and a sense of belonging, and enables them to improve their lives.

His Majesty urged the representatives to convey to the beneficiaries the importance of protecting their land.

“I am handing over this land to you with the hope that you will protect it, make the best of it and use it to benefit the lives of your children,” His Majesty said.

His Majesty granted *tokha* to the people, and spent that afternoon interacting with them.

380,099 voters on the roll

About 67,300 more people will vote for the NC election in April 23 this year compared with the figure in 2008.

Following the “claims and objections” period, which closed on March 20, the final electoral roll released by the elction commission on March 27, indicated a total of 380,099 voters, who qualify to vote for the election on April 23.

The first council election in 2008 saw 312,817 voters registered.

The electoral roll also confirms there are more female than male voters. Of the total, 192,860 are female, while 187,239 are male.

Also, for the elections, more than 18 percent of the registered voters have been listed to vote by post. Election commission has recorded 71,525 registered postal voters.

However, of the dzongkhags, unlike in the past, where Trashigang always maintained the top rank in terms of registered voters, this time, Samtse has taken over with 41,596 voters. Trashigang comes second with 41,238, followed by Mongar with 30,677 voters.

Gasa has the lowest number of voters, 1,830.





The former Paro NC out of the Race



The former National Council representative of Paro, Ugyen Tshering, lost to a newcomer, Sonam Wangchuk, 25, by 65 percent of the total votes cast during the gewog zomdue. 798 voters from Dop-Shari Gewog had turned up from a total of 1,585 eligible voters to nominate their candidate for the National Council election.

Ugyen Tshering had resigned before his tenure was over to re-contest.

Sonam Wangchuk will now be contesting against four other candidates, Kaka Tshering from Wangchang Gewog, Ugyen Tshering from Lamgong Gewog, Tshewang Norbu from Lugnyi Gewog and Kinley Dorji from Naja Gewog.

Royal Audit Authority spots irregularities in construction of domestic airports

About 50 percent of the Nu. 435 million that was spent on the construction of the three domestic airports in the country have been lost in illegal over-payment or have been wasted through avoidable expenditure.

The Draft Audit report has made note of the improper use of funds, legal and ethical issues with ineligible bidders being given tenders, fake bills being honoured and documents going 'missing'.

The quality of work at the airports has been compromised, and a lot of the planned infrastructure is incomplete.

An over-payment of Nu. 2.5 million was supposed to have been made for paving the runway at Bathpalathang.

It appears the RAA also suspects collusion between engineers and contractors.

The Minister of Information and Communication, Nandalal Rai, says the MoIC is still holding dialogues with the RAA about irregularities concerning the three domestic airports.

He has accused a local media of being vindictive, and says any comments he makes on the matter would be preemptive as the report is still in its draft form.

MOST DISCUSSED

700

youth turned up for the briefing on training and employment in Thimphu Tech Park. Of the 700, 241 were university graduates.

However, there are only 200 slots available.

22

civil servants from six ministries and two government agencies to date have officially resigned from the civil service to contest the upcoming elections.

500 M USD

financial assistance received from Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the last three decades, half of that amount was received in the last five years.

135

of the 153 pledges made by the DPT have been fulfilled, claims the party.

900

trees have been felled so far for the re-construction of Wangdue Dzong.



Title: *Kira Pattern*
Artist: *Tashi Ongmo*
Medium: *Mix Media*

The artist creates an infinite space within the limited frame of the canvas which she sees as a window into another dimension. She creates space that is charged with a quiet energy and this space is characterized by buoyancy, lightness and an atmospheric feel. This is drawn from the idea of a meditative mind. She mostly uses oil paint, acrylic, gouache, ink, charcoal and gesso to create a variety of weight, volume, transparency and staining in her artwork.



TERTON
GALLERY

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LAST WORD

A few questions before we go bi-monthly. Not to worry, the questions are fairly simple really. All you need to do is read the instructions carefully. Ready? Here we go: Most of you picked up newspapers this morning. You glanced through the front page that carried the main story, with the big, bold headline in black ink on white paper. Perhaps you perused only the lead paragraph or you went through the entire article. Now, answer these questions. 1. Who wrote the article? 2. Why don't you find senior journalists writing articles anymore?

OK, your time's up!

How many of you left the space meant for the answers blank? Don't panic, relax! We in the media fraternity are used to readers like you. We know you rarely notice the byline on a newspaper/magazine story. And rightly so, for you're more interested in the information than the person providing it. But, having said that, how many of you are content with the information that's being provided to you? No! You don't have to answer that. And no, it's not a trick question.


Politicians, we won't entertain your answers because we are aware of the reporters you loathe and the ones you love. Yes, we know, you look at the byline as soon as you've read the big, bold headline in black ink on white paper. So, please stay mum on anything remotely concerning the media as you have 'graciously' done for so long. We know that you know that journalism is like politics, in that you will be lashed for being right and lashed for being wrong. We understand it sucks either way. We don't want to drag you into this and if you still harbor a doubt, well, let's just agree that rolling in the mud is not the best way to get clean.

That settled, there may be some amongst you (who're not politicians) delighting in the unique style of passionate writers/reporters/journalists who take pride in the back grounding, research and reporting to bring a story to life. And there may be some amongst you who cringe while reading stories that are half-baked, questionable and lopsided. These are stories by reporters who've just ventured into the profession, unsure not only about what they've written but also about whether they'll be handed their paychecks at the end of the month.

The point so many of us have tried to drive home is that media houses are embattled, the print media in particular and private media houses to be specific. Plagued by lack of advertisements, shaken by government circulars, challenged by the daunting task of staying afloat, we have, for quite a while now, been a focus of concern. Now disillusioned senior media professionals have moved into other fields to make a living and the new ones, because they've already bought the ticket, are left with no other options but to take the ride – bumpy as it may be.

Yet, nobody seems to notice. And nobody seems to care. A few publications have folded; the rest are following suit, but we reckon, as long as the remaining keep publishing – even without paying their staff for months on end – the world, as we now know, will keep on turning. But eventually when the next government is voted in, you might not get to 'meet the press.'

There was a time just before Bhutan's transition to democracy when newspapers and magazines were considered vital. Today, the fourth estate is fighting the mother of all battles just to register an equitable plot. It isn't so much about the bylines or about disillusioned senior journalists. It isn't even about the people who are dedicated to their craft, who produce the words you read, and who are prepared to stand behind them. It's about all people having voices and a place to express their voices, unhindered and unafraid. It's about people forging identities for themselves. It's about strengthening one of the oldest democratic institutions that contributes to a healthy democracy.

In the end, there is nothing more tragic than the media dying under circumstances which could have been easily avoided had the government come up with proper policies to bolster its growth rather than appearing to speak softly, but with a big stick in hand. 

Mitra Raj