

26 november – 3 december 2005

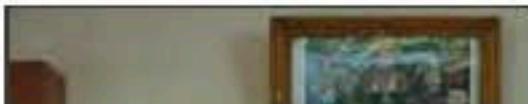
## PHUENTSHOLING-THIMPHU-PARO



## Journey from Phuentsholing to Thimphu, Sunday 27 November 2005

We woke up Sunday morning at Druk Hotel in Phuentsholing, our first morning in Bhutan. After checking out from the hotel we were picked up by our guide and driver, Mr. Samdruk, a Bhutanese with a degree in Commerce from Bangalore in India. He works as free-lance guide for foreign tourists and is connected to the Centre for Bhutanese Studies in Thimphu.

We returned over the open border to India and got the necessary exit stamps from the Indian passport office, opening at 9 o'clock, then back through the gate to Phuentsholing, and proceeded to the Bhutanese Immigration office to get our visas (*photo of the visa officer in charge, see below*).



After watching some Bhutanese teams practising the national sports of Archery (*photo to the right*) and the Bhutanese variety of dart game, Khuru, we left Phuentsholing for a seven hours journey to the capital of



Bhutan, Thimphu.

It was a fantastic tour along a steep road with hairpin bends all the time, surrounded by mountains and a dramatic nature full of fascinating views. Along the road we had to pass at least three checkpoints, where the car and the passengers were reported.

If there is any place close to heaven, maybe this is. We gradually realise that we are in what the Bhutanese refer to as an actually existing 'Shangri-la', where progress and development is measured, not in pecuniary terms alone, or even literacy and infant mortality as in the Human Development Index, but as a weighted index called Gross National Happiness.

We are passing the water power stations being built by India (producing not only electricity but also good income for the Bhutanese government), roadside eateries and petrol stations all nicely designed in a typical Bhutanese style (see the petrol station on the photo to the right). In the afternoon we reach the plain where Thimphu is located, a town that has grown a lot in recent years. The houses now stretch far up the hillsides, and down along the river Bhutan's first stretch of highway is being constructed.

We were taken to Jambayang Resort, a small hotel beautifully located with a view

over the entire city. Here we would stay for two nights.

- [Read more about our first impressions from Bhutan](#)

### Thimphu, Monday 28 November

- [Visit to the Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education](#)
- [Visit to Royal Civil Service Commission](#)
- [Visit to the Centre for Bhutan Studies](#)
- [Visit to Royal University of Bhutan](#)

### Thimphu-Paro, Tuesday, 29 November 2005



This day was devoted to seeing the most important sights in Thimphu and the historic town of Paro, 60 km away, from where we were going to fly out of the country the following day.

After checking out from our Thimphu hotel we first visited the Folk Heritage Museum in Thimphu, consisting of one big traditional farm house. We were guided by the museum guide Ms. Karma (photo to the left), who herself hails from a village far away with no road connection. So she knew what she was showing us.

It is a self-contained farmstead with a four-storied house, with a compound wall at one side of the house, where horses and other cattle are kept together with the ploughs and other implements used. On the ground floor is room for more cattle, floor 1 is used for storing grains and saddles. On second floor is the kitchen, the combined drawing and sleeping room, and the altar room, where also monks and honoured guests usually stay over night. On the top floor there are no walls, being the place for drying of straw, etc.

The most impressive thing about these traditional houses is the woodworks around the windows.

We then proceeded to Paro. The road passed through scenic beauty, with a river at the bottom of the valleys and surrounding high mountains.

We learnt that there were trout fishes in the river and that sport fishing was allowed in some places. As we came closer to Paro the landscape changed, we came out into a plainland, flat enough to accommodate Bhutan's only airport. Paro is a much smaller town than Thimphu, located in the shadow of an old fort, dzong. On a nearby hilltop stands an old watchtower, built by stone. This building with several floors has been converted into the National Museum of Bhutan (see photo), and that was our first stop.

The museum houses the history of Bhutan from the 15th century onwards, which is closely connected with the spread of Buddhism in the region. From the early 16th century there is a kind of a nation state formation organised by leading abbots of that time, who conquered and ruled the land and the people with hired soldiers and the word of Buddha.

This theocratic state existed up to 1907, when under British 'protection' a royal dynasty was installed in Thimphu. The present ruler is the fourth king of Bhutan. Most probably the British found it hard to negotiate with a religious head of state.

### Paro-Kathmandu, Wednesday 30 November 2005

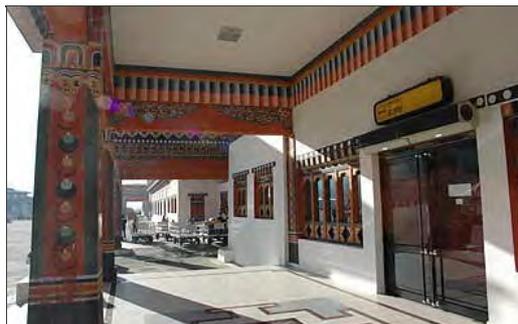
After an overnight stay at Kichu Resort in Paro we left in the early morning for the airport. Our Druk Air flight was scheduled for 09.30, and we spent the waiting time inside the beautiful airport terminal building, as most buildings in Paro designed in a typical Bhutanese architecture (photo to the right).

The one-hour flight between Paro and Kathmandu is probably one of the most scenic in the World. Sitting on the right side of the plane we had extraordinary views of the Himalayas.

It was clear sunshine as we sailed just over the beautiful mountain range, first green Bhutanese hills with valleys richly inhabited and later with the naked snow covered cliffs of the highest mountains in the world on our right hand side, Kanchenjunga and Mount Everest so close and the Tibetan tablelands behind. Totally amazing sights, this is the wonder that you may experience only once in a lifetime.



Paro Valley. Red chillies, much eaten in Bhutan, are being dried on the roofs.



Basic page *2005 Bhutan impressions Phuentsholing – Thimphu* has been updated.

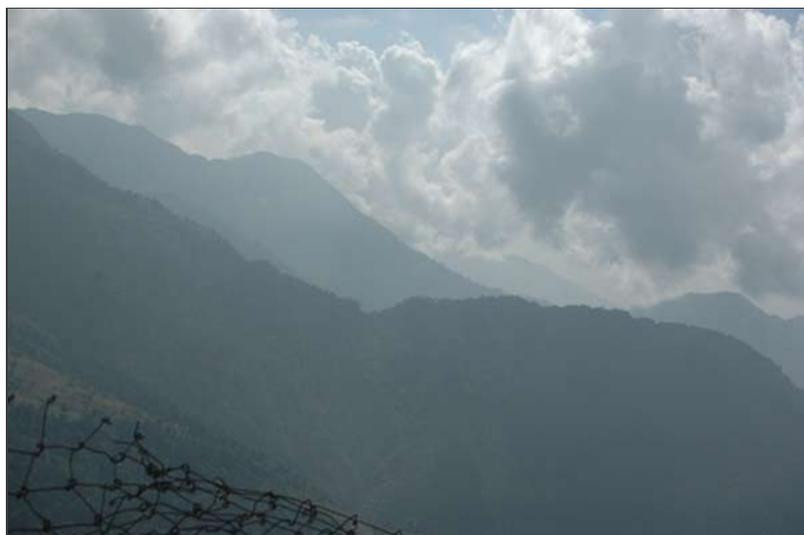
## 2005 Bhutan impressions Phuentsholing – Thimphu

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Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

### Bhutan impressions, from a journey Phuentsholing – Thimphu, Sunday 27 November

This is tropical green – all kinds of crops can be grown, rice, fruits and vegetables, but only on miniscule plots on terraces of the mountain slopes and for family use. Women inherit all property, including land, so no male land grabbing here! Little is exported – we know of only apples. But the forest is rich and if you can log it and cart it somewhere, it is certainly worth it. But that is a royal prerogative, all forest belong to the state. The real asset in these mountains are the



streams, rivers and waterfalls – the most important source of income to the government and those sharing in state incomes is export of hydro-electric power to India.

Houses have an appearance like in many mountain countries, like Switzerland or Austria, with flatly sloping roofs but there is a distinct Himalayan touch with all the woodwork decorations. There must be a lot of very good carpenters around.

Not all houses are like that. We find rows of shacks belonging to, it is said, those Lhotshampa Nepalese people who are still working and living here.

### The king guides the country

With a population of about 7 lakhs this is of course a very small humanity to govern for the Bhutanese King, the fourth in line since the creation of an all-Bhutan kingdom in 1907. He guards the Buddhist tradition of most Bhutanese and he now guides the country into a negotiated modernity that is rather unique in South Asia, not to speak of the rest of the world.

In the early 1990's the king declared a Bhutanese code of conduct, the so-called Driglam namzha ([more information](#)).

While at work, in offices or factories, citizens should wear a

National Museum in Paro

national dress, which we now see on many people around, increasingly so as we approach the capital Thimphu. It is not really a uniform, however, and we see many different patterns and colours of the dress.

Second, all should speak the national language Dzongkha. It was supported by most people and seems well anchored in the Bhutanese ethnoses. The Lhotshampa minority though, of Nepalese origin but since generations in Bhutan, objected and mobilised against it with some violence in the end. As a result, about a lakh of these people are now staying in refugee camps on the other side of the border to Nepal.

The king is also the guardian of the Himalayan Buddhism practiced here, but with a 'division of labour' with the Chief Abbot of Lama, who is the spiritual head and with the same status as the king. All inhabitants are not Buddhists, but most are however divided by tribal distinctions and languages. A decisive minority is also Hindu, whether hailing from Nepal or parts of northern India.



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## New constitution is coming

A new constitution is in the making, allowing for a constitutional democracy and freedom of religion. Negotiations are going on about the return of the refugees in camps in Nepal.

We meet a lorry representing Coca-Cola Bhutan. We see people with modern consumer goods all around but mixing it with a distinct everyday traditional Buddhist culture. Internet came late here as did TV. Both of these modern media were introduced in 1999 and there is now a national channel with English subtitles. However, satellite TV is also there and the Bhutanese can take the whole world into their drawing rooms.

Tourism is still much limited. It is more or less restricted to an up market exclusive tourist inflow via tour groups, and each tourist must pay about 220 dollars a day, all inclusive.

The state of Bhutan owns all rivers, forests, and mineral resources and the environment is protected by strict rules about logging prescribing that at least 60 per cent of the Bhutan territory should be covered with forest. As we approach the central part of the kingdom, we can see that the higher areas, where pine trees grow, are less fully covered with forests, and we understand that this may be a necessary protective measure. However, nothing like the devastating deforestation that has taken place in other parts of the Himalaya can be seen here.

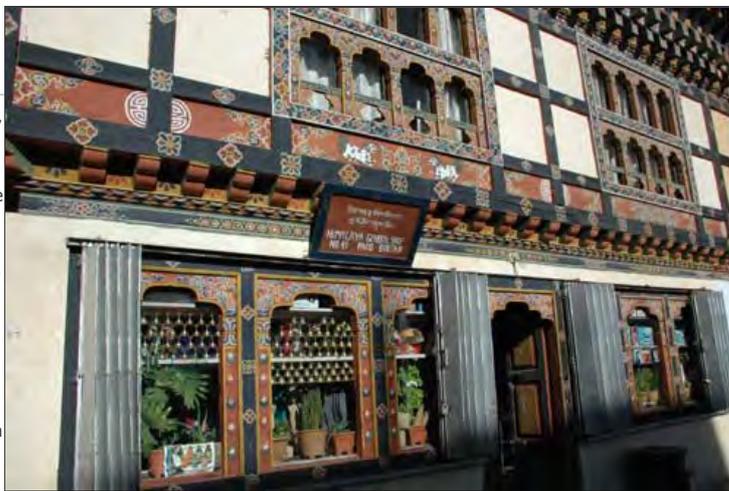
Tobacco is banned, and smugglers from India have a hard time, since the Bhutan police and army is now well equipped to deal with troublemakers after its build up to successfully fight Indian tribal extremist groups hiding within Bhutan borders in the 1990s.

How come such an autonomous approach to national borders, culture and economy has been possible in South Asia on the border to China? Can it be preserved in this era of globalisation?

India and China seem to have held each other at bay in this case, neither allowing the other any interference. Bhutan, has also not had any decisive internal challenge to its system of rule, like that in Sikkim, which simply couldn't handle Nepalese uprisings in the seventies and, therefore, asked for Indian help. Sikkim was immediately annexed by India in 1975, and China couldn't really stop it.

More interestingly

though. Has Bhutan found a formula also for preserving difference in a world of equalising global forces of commerce, culture and politics? It really remains to be seen, but should be worth a close follow up by all those people who value cultural roots and a sound environment.



The centre of power in Bhutan, the dzong in Thimphu housing the offices of the King as well as of the Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo) who is chosen from among the most learned lamas of the country. He enjoys an equal rank with the King.

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## Bhutan Ministry of Education

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Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

**Thimphu, 28 November**

**Visit to Department of Adult and Higher Education, Ministry of Education**

**Web page:** <http://www.education.gov.bt/DAHE/NFED/NFE.htm>



We met Ms. [Nim Dem](#), Director (photo to the left). She is in charge of higher education, that is the university education as well as of adult and informal education.

We first discussed the school system in Bhutan. It is a 12 year system, divided into primary 1-6, lower secondary 7-8, middle secondary 9-10, and higher secondary 11-12. The medium of instruction is English from the first standard. Buddhism, however, is taught in Dzongkha, the national language.



### **Ambitious educational system**

They have a very ambitious system and today almost all children go to school, the ratio between boys and girls being about 55/45. But many children live far away from the schools in rural area and have a very long way to walk to reach. When rains are heavy, they are often late or miss school altogether for many days.

There are 19 private schools which charge a nominal fee and are monitored by the Ministry. School books are given free to all students.

At the higher level about 120 students go abroad annually for undergraduate studies on scholarships from the Bhutanese government. Included in this figure is a group 50 students who are given complete scholarships by India. In other cases some part funding is received from some countries and colleges where the students are studying. We inform about the possibilities for Master and PhD studies in Sweden.

### **Frustrated young generation**

Many in the current youth generation after the age of 20 are frustrated with the career opportunities and are unemployed. It is not that there are no jobs, but their and their parents' expectations have been high and the actual jobs offered do not match these. In this group, there is quite a wide use of drugs. So it represents a serious problem for the Bhutanese government. The schools try to provide career counselling in the higher secondary now. One important aim is to make many students return to agriculture with their new knowledge in order to introduce scientific farming. But most young people want to move to the cities.

For those that have not finished school properly, the Department is setting up classes of continuing education from 2006 onwards. They have asked the private schools to do this and hope that they will respond to this challenge.

We inform about the Swedish Folk High School System and Ms. Nim Dem said that it would perhaps be interesting to study that and get some advice about continuing education in Sweden. We promised to host such a visit with contacts, etc.



### **Visit to Royal Civil Service Commission, Bhutan**

**Web page:**

<http://www.rcsc.gov.bt/>

We met Mr. Bap Kesang, who is the Secretary. The Commission is organising the government administration in the country. He gave a long introduction to modern Bhutan and its development during the past 40 years. It is very important that Bhutan is understood in its proper perspective, he claims.

His Majesty's policies have been enlightened when thinking about the difficult times that Bhutan was



facing a generation back. People were illiterate and there were no resources to develop the country. They had to

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import everything, skilled people and goods. Bhutan has received a lot of aid for this, both bilateral and multilateral.

Bhutan became member of the United Nations in 1972, and at that time the government stated that there were 1 million people in the country to avoid being treated as a very small country. The official UN figure for the population today is therefore 2.4 million. The real figure is thought to be only 750 000. A Census has just been held and the result is expected soon.

Development has been rapid since then. Now Bhutan adopts modern technology in all spheres and has a great many highly educated citizens, both men and women.

The Bureaucracy is now being reformed from a cadre based to position classification based system. The Royal Institute of Management at the University is in charge of training the new officers. They offer masters programme in financial management, policy and public administration. Continuing education of government servants will also be provided. They are affiliated to the National Institute of Financial Management in India, but are also looking for other foreign collaboration.



Mr Bap Kesang flanked by Prof. Staffan Lindberg and Mr. Lars Eklund, SASNET.

Mr. Bap Kesang has formerly been Bhutan's ambassador in Geneva, which looks after diplomatic relations with Sweden. He has many Swedish friends through the active [Swedish-Bhutan Society](#) (Svensk-Bhutanesiska Föreningen), and he also knows of a few Bhutanese people married to Swedes.

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## November 2005 SASNET Visit to Centre for Bhutan Studies (CBS) in Thimphu

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Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

**Web page:** <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt/>

**E-mail address:** [cbs@druknet.bt](mailto:cbs@druknet.bt)



*Senior researcher Karma Galay, Director Karma Ura, and member of the Council of CBS Dasho Megraj Gurung at the Centre for Bhutan Studies in Langjophakha, Thimphu.*

On 28 November 2005, Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg visited CBS, the centre that organised our visit to Bhutan through Mr. [Karma Galay](#) (who was senior researcher there).

We were received in Langjophakha, the area in which the Centre is located, by Mr. [Karma Ura](#), who is the Director of the centre since its start in 1999. Present at the meeting was also Mr. [Dorji Penjore](#), researcher in languages (whom Staffan had met in a Delhi conference in February 2005).

This was at moment the only institution which carried out research in Bhutan in a focused way. The Royal University of Bhutan, [see separate report](#), had only recently taken up research in a few areas. The centre is doing studies of government development programmes and provides feedback for their improvement. It undertakes 'inter-disciplinary studies of Bhutan in its social, cultural, and economic aspects focussing largely on contemporary issues.' It also supports basic research by other agents in Bhutan and acts a clearing-house of information on various studies by others. It hosts foreign scholars who do research or come to lecture.

The centre has also started to publish research reports and it publishes the bi-annual Journal of Bhutan Studies. A list of 45 research reports is available with us. They cover issues in economics, government, social structure, culture, Buddhist traditions, historical research on various areas in Bhutan, youth studies, etc. The academic background of the research staff is in public administration, economics, languages, and political and cultural studies. [More information on the publications from CBS.](#)

### **Index for Gross National Happiness**

The term Gross National Happiness (GNH) was coined by Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, when he ascended the throne in 1972. It signalled his commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan's unique culture permeated by Buddhist spiritual values.

Today, the concept of GNH resonates with a wide range of initiatives, across the world, to define prosperity in more holistic terms and to measure actual wellbeing rather than consumption. By contrast the conventional concept of Gross National Product (GNP) measures only the sum total of material production and exchange in any country. Thus an international conference on Gross National Happiness, hosted by the Bhutan government in the capital city of Thimphu in 2004, attracted 82 eminent participants from 20 countries. [More information on GNH in an article](#) by Indian journalist Rajni Bakshi, posted on *Alternet/Envirohealth*, 25 January 2005.

A central theme for research at the Ceentre for Bhutan Studies as instructed by the Government is to work out an index for Gross National Happiness, and make it measurable. The index should have the following dimensions:

- *Living standard*
- *Health*
- *Education*
- *Eco-system vitality and biodiversity*
- *Community vitality and interdependence*
- *Good governance*
- *Cultural resilience and diversity*

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- *Time use and balance (margin of leisure time available)*
- *Emotional well-being*

We discussed the good governance issue, and found out that it could be operationalised at the local as well as national level. One aspect is corruption, where the CBS researchers meant that this was sensitive and could not really be dealt with by foreign scholars due to its inherent national ethical character and the sensitivity of the information collected. Otherwise CBS welcomed foreign collaboration in constructing the index. We also agreed that several disciplines would have to be involved.

We then discussed the gender equality issue. With the modernisation started about 40 years ago, women got education also on the higher levels and were free to join the government administration, higher institutions and also work as professionals. There were little in the way of formal obstacles to this and many women now work in these spheres. However, women here as elsewhere face constraints connected to child birth and family obligations. On the other hand, the extended family system allows for a great many relatives who can take care of the children when the parents are working. Even so, career women have fewer if any children. It is also so that the extended family system is declining in urban areas.

## Sensitive issues

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*The centre of power in Bhutan, the dzong in Thimphu housing the offices of the King as well as of the Chief Abbot (Je Khenpo) who is chosen from among the most learned lamas of the country.*

CBS is undertaking quite a few economic studies directly for the government. Many of these are however not published due to the sensitive information sometimes dealt with.

Regarding the Lhotshampa refugee problem, relating to the six southern districts of Bhutan, CBS is not involved in any studies about this. There are already so many studies of them by Nepalese scholars, is an argument. Anyway, the ongoing negotiations will allow a proportion of the refugees with legitimate rights to return to Bhutan, others will have to stay on in Nepal or find a place in the rest of the world (that is, those who did commit crimes during the agitation, etc.).

We discussed the issue of cultural pluralism. The population of Bhutan is small, but there are many groups with different languages, cultures and origins in the different regions. On the other hand, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition is very strong. So is there unity in diversity after all? CBS researchers had the view that diversity is an important asset to national strength and creativity and should be strived for.

## WTO and the risk of mass tourism

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A final point of discussion was about Bhutan joining the World Trade Organisation, WTO. The current government seems bent on joining fairly soon, but the CBS researchers were not so convinced about the merits of joining. The Bhutanese economy is rather self-contained. Exports are mainly based on local advantages, like that of hydroelectric power and cement to India. None of these represent a global good. The only engagement in global good production is tourism. If the country joins the WTO, mass tourism would probably follow, a phenomenon which they argue would undermine the special character of Bhutan within a generation. Perhaps you can ride the tiger for a short while, but what about the day after tomorrow?

We also discussed possible collaboration with Swedish researchers. A PhD candidate from the [Department of Religious Studies](#), Göteborg University worked till 2002 in Bhutan on a project called "*Field studies in the religious life of ordinary Bhutanese in a time of transition*", but currently there are, as far as we know, no Swedes engaged in Bhutan studies. So it would have to be to start from scratch to find interested partners in Sweden. We promised to try, given that they write to us about their interests in this, based on Swedish competence in various fields.

After the formal meeting we were invited to Mr. Karma Ura's house for a delicious lunch with traditional Bhutanese dishes. We also came to see an art project that Karma Ura is presently undertaking. He is a painter as well, and he has just started to work on a big wall painting with religious motives that eventually will be given to a Buddhist monastery.

**[Back to SASNET Report from the contact journey to North-East India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, November–December 2005](#)**

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## SASNET Visit to Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), Monday 28 November 2005

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### RUB web page:

<http://www.rub.edu.bt/>

While planning the visit to Bhutan we had been in touch with Ms. [Phintsho Choeden](#), Research Director at the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). On behalf of the Vice Chancellor Mr. [Dasho Zangley Dukpa](#) she had expressed an eager interest to meet us. But as we arrived in the country it turned out that both Ms Choeden and the Vice-Chancellor were away from Thimphu, and no programme had been arranged for us to visit RUB.

Ms. [Nim Dem](#), Director of the Dept. of Adult and Higher Education at the Ministry of Education, whom we met in the morning however kindly made it possible for us to visit RUB in the afternoon, and we went by car to Semtokha, five kilometres away from Thimphu, where the RUB administration building with the Vice Chancellor's office is located.

There we were received by Ms. [Kesang Doma](#), Registrar of the university (*photo to the right*), and had a meeting with her in the Vice Chancellor's office. Ms. Doma informed us about the history of RUB, established as late as in June 2003, and briefly presented the nine educational institutions that are included under the umbrella of RUB.

### Three institutions in Thimphu



Students at the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) in Thimphu.

Four of the institutions are located within Thimphu. They are the [Royal Institute of Management \(RIM\)](#), established already in 1986, and located right near to the RUB administration building; the [National Institute of Traditional Medicine \(NITM\)](#) with only a very limited number

of students; the [Royal Institute of Health Sciences \(RIHS\)](#), located close to the Jigme Dorji Wangchuk National Referral Hospital; and the [Institute for Language and Cultural Studies \(ILCS\)](#) in Semtokha.

Outside Thimphu are found the [Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology](#) in Rinchening, Phuntsholing; the two National Institutes of Educations in [Paro](#) and in [Samtse](#); the [College of Natural Resources](#) in Lobeysa (offering diploma programmes in Animal husbandry, Agriculture and Forestry); and finally the [Sherubtse College](#) in Kanglung, Trashigang, an institution that has been a full-fledged degree awarding affiliate college of the University of Delhi since 1983, and has a large proportion of Indian teachers among its faculty.



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Altogether the nine institutions that form the Royal University of Bhutan has a teaching staff of 337, out of which 79 are non-Bhutanese (mainly in Sherubtse College), and the number of students in October 2005 was 3.553, out of which 125 are participating in post graduate programmes. The largest institutions are Sherubtse College with 1.014 students, the National Institute of Education in Paro with 744 students, the sister institution in Samtse with 483, and the Royal Institute of Technology with 446. The Bhutanese crown prince HRH DASHO JIGME KHEGAR NAMGYEL WANGCHUCK is the Chancellor of the university.

### Royal Institute of Management

The Royal Institute of Management has a special status as it has its own charter and is semi-independent of RUB. Besides it offers no undergraduate studies, but only postgraduate. A special feature with most of the institutions is that they till 2003, when RUB was established, were very intimately connected to different ministries, e.g. the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Health.

Ms. Kesang Doma also informed us about the ambition of RUB to increase the number of International collaboration projects, so far very few and none with Sweden. Besides the long-standing connection between Sherubtse College and University of Delhi, there also exists a collaboration between the Royal Institute of Health Sciences and La Trobe University in Australia. The National Institute of Education in Paro is involved in co-operation with the University of New Brunswick in Canada, and the Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology has collaboration with the Indian Institutes of Technology in Kanpur and Kharagpur. Sherubtse College also has some collaboration with Wheaton College in USA. Recently the Vice Chancellor went to Austria, and discussed possible co-operation with the Institute of Applied Sciences in Krems. On the agenda was to initiate tourism research which would result in a tourism degree.



### Traditional subjects

Traditional Bhutanese subjects play an important role in the RUB institutions. The National Institute of Traditional Medicine is a unique institution, striving to achieve excellence in the design, development and delivery of the so-called *gSo-ba-Rig-pa* education, to a handful of students every year. The Institute for Language and Cultural Studies focuses on Buddhist Philosophy, Bhutanese History and also Astrology, still considered of utmost importance in Bhutan. The study of social sciences on the other hand is almost non-existent. It is supposed to be on the curriculum at Sherubtse College, but the present and future plans presented for the College for the period 2006-2010 only mentions the launching of new programmes in Business Administration, Dzongkha (the national language), Computer Science, English, Economics, Science and Geography.

Before returning to the Jambayang Resort Hotel, for a comforting traditional Bhutanese stone bath in the evening, we made a quick tour of the Royal Institute of Management, met some students all dressed up in traditional Bhutanese dresses, and saw the impressive auditorium of the institute.

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