

**TRANSLATION OF THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE 86TH SESSION OF THE
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF BHUTAN**

(December 22 - January 8, 2007)

I. INAUGURAL CEREMONY

The 86th Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan commenced on the auspicious 2nd Day of the 11th Month of the Fire Male Dog Year of the Bhutanese calendar corresponding to December 22, 2006. His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo was escorted to the Assembly Hall with *Chipdrel* and *Serdang* procession which was followed by the traditional *Zhugdrel Phuensum Tshogpai* ceremony. In his opening address, the Speaker welcomed His Majesty the Fifth King, members of the Royal Family, members of the National Assembly, representatives of the international donor agencies and other guests to the inaugural ceremony.

The Speaker said that His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan ascended the throne at the tender age of 16 and ruled the country for 34 years, selflessly dedicating Himself in the service of the people. His Majesty the King had assured the sovereignty and security of the nation. The Speaker expressed that no amount of sacrifice and deed would be able to repay His Majesty the Fourth King for bequeathing us a secure and a stable nation both for the present and future generations.

The Speaker added that people were stunned with indescribable grief and sadness when His Majesty the King handed over his responsibilities as the Monarch and the Head of the State to the Crown Prince, His Royal Highness the Trongsa Penlop on 14th December, 2006. Nevertheless, given that His Majesty the Fifth King was well learned and groomed in governance and statecraft, the people had full faith and confidence in His Majesty's decision in handing over the responsibilities of the state to His Royal Highness.

The Speaker also said that the inaugural ceremony of the 86th Session had a historical significance since it was graced by His Majesty the Fifth King for the first time after taking over the responsibilities as the Monarch and the Head of State . It was indeed the fortune of the people to have had the opportunity to witness such an auspicious day. The Speaker, on behalf of the members of the National Assembly and the people expressed their heartfelt Tashi Delek to His Majesty the Fifth King.

The members appealed to His Majesty the Fourth King for continuous guidance and direction to the National Assembly. Further the Speaker, on behalf of the members and the people pledged their unwavering loyalty and support to His Majesty the Fifth King.

II. OFFERING OF *TASHI LEKMOEN*

The Dorji Lopen on behalf of the clergy (Dratshang), the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government, the Zhung Kalyon on behalf of the Royal Advisory Council, Major General Bato Tshering on behalf of the three armed forces and on people's behalf the Bumthang Chimi Jambay from central region, Punakha Chimi Namgay Phuntsho from western region, Trashigang Chimi Yoenten Samdrup from eastern region, Samtse Chimi Sangay Khandu from southern region and the representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Deputy Speaker expressed their appreciation to His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo and offered *Tashi Lekmoen* to His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo as follows:

The members submitted that, the unexpected abdication and handing over of the responsibilities to the Fifth Druk Gyalpo by the Fourth Druk Gyalpo left the people in a state of illusion, complete disbelief and with mixed feelings. His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo had to take over the helm of the country at a tender age and had ruled the country for the last 34 years in which time Bhutan had seen unprecedented socio economic development, its security and sovereignty strengthened, looked after the welfare of His people and ushered in the process of

democratization. The members submitted that no deed would repay His Majesty for all that He has done for the country and the people.

The members submitted that in an unprecedented departure from the normal tradition of the world where the leaders battled for power, His Majesty the King had renounced the Throne before His time, an act that is unheard of in any modern history.

Parallel to the unprecedented socio-economic development in the Kingdom, His Majesty the King, besides personally initiating renovations and restorations of the entire Dzongs, Dratshangs, Lhakhangs and Goendeys to its original glory, established numerous religious institutions in the Kingdom and generously looked after the welfare of the religious community. Members expressed their unlimited gratitude for the developments brought about by His Majesty the King.

The members submitted that another historical legacy of His Majesty the King was that during the southern problem in 1990 and the 2003 ULFA problem, His Majesty selflessly took on the responsibility and successfully resolved the serious threats on the nation's security and sovereignty and brought peace and tranquility in the Kingdom. These selfless sacrifices had ensured present peace and sovereignty of the nation as well as its future security. It was extremely important for every Bhutanese people to remember and celebrate the 22nd Day of the 10th Month of the Female Water Sheep Year corresponding to December 15, 2003 as a day of victory over the militants. Since then, the trust and confidence of the people in the three armed forces under the leadership of His Majesty the King had heightened and surged enormously as never before. Members offered their sincere prayers for the good health and long life of His Majesty the King.

The National Assembly on behalf of all the people, offered their sincere *Tashi Lekmoen* to His Royal Highness the Crown Prince for taking on the responsibilities of the Fifth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan. The members further offered prayers to His Majesty the Fifth King, the upholder of the *Chhoesid-nyi*, that under His dynamic

leadership, the country and the people experience unprecedented peace and prosperity. Bearing the guardian deities of the Palden Drukpa as witnesses, the Government, Dratshang, the People and the three armed forces reposed their full faith and confidence and sincerely pledged their loyalty and dedication to the Fifth Druk Gyalpo of Bhutan, in the sacred Hall of the National Assembly.

III. REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE 85TH SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The Zhung Kalyon presented a brief report consisting of 13 points on the implementation status of the resolutions of the 85th Session of the National Assembly. A copy of the 19 page report was also distributed to the members.

During the deliberation on the report, members submitted that although the 85th Session of the National Assembly had resolved that the Election Act, being one of the important laws for the establishment of parliamentary democracy, was to be tabled in the 86th Session for enactment, the postponement of the enactment of Election Act was indicative of non-compliance with the Resolution of the National Assembly. Furthermore, the members said that there would be many inconveniences in the implementation of the election processes and procedures if the Election Act was not enacted. The provision in the draft Election Act which required a minimum qualification of a university degree to become a member of Parliament was indicative of the fact that the opportunity to participate in the political parties was being given only to 2% of the population and that the remaining 98% of the population were being barred from taking part in the political process. The members said that it was giving the people a feeling that the rights of the people were being annulled. Looking at the present scenario, there were only 11,000 university graduates in the country which meant that only 2% of the population could stand for election. The members expressed doubts on the success of a democracy where only 2% of the population represented the people.

Members submitted that it was imperative to deliberate on the provisions of the Election Bill in order to have a free and fair general election. Moreover, the minimum degree qualification did not matter so long as the member understood the concerns of the people and was capable enough to look after the welfare of the people. Therefore, educational qualification should not be the sole criterion to be a member of Parliament. It was important to emphasize on one's dedication, sincerity and integrity than on educational qualification. Members submitted that the Election Bill should be endorsed in the current session of the National Assembly and if there was a Command from the Druk Gyalpo on the issue, the members be informed of the Command.

The members submitted that the colour of *Kabneys* for the Council of Ministers, Royal Advisory Councillors and members of the National Assembly should be changed in order to establish a standardized and uniform system prior to the institution of parliamentary democracy. It was also important to document the historical significance of the different colours of *Kabneys* that are existent today.

Members submitted that although the ban on sale of alcohol would affect the revenue of the Government, considering the lives that alcohol was claiming and the huge amounts that the Government spend on patients suffering from alcohol related diseases, it was imperative to initiate and adopt measures to ban alcohol in the country.

Members pointed out that although the 85th Session of the National Assembly had banned the organization of trade fairs and gambling activities during annual *Tshechus* and *Wang Lung Thri* ceremonies, trade fairs and gambling activities had been continuing in some Dzongkhags. Therefore, members submitted that a reminder be issued by the National Assembly.

Some of the members submitted that the NAPE (New Approach to Primary Education) system of education was responsible for the deterioration of quality of education in the country. Moreover, despite Institute for Language and Cultural

Studies (ILCS) at Semtokha being the only language institute in the country, it lacked proper facilities. The facilities at ILCS were not comparable even to that of the facilities of a primary school. Therefore, the members submitted that it was important to make improvements and provide appropriate facilities.

In response, the Prime Minister explained that the Election Commission was a constitutional and an independent office. Therefore, the presence of the Chief Election Commissioner was required during such deliberations. The Prime Minister suggested that the matter be discussed according to the Agenda and also invite the Chief Election Commissioner as a special guest during the deliberation on the matters relating to Election Bill.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs informed the Assembly that the Council of Ministers did not deliberate on the matter relating to colour of *Kabneys* for the Ministers, Councillors and National Assembly members. Since the authority to award *Kabneys* was vested in His Majesty the King, the Minister suggested it would be best if the present system was preserved and maintained without any changes.

Similarly, the Education Minister said that the NAPE system of education was introduced in the country after witnessing its success in other renowned countries. However, the system was withdrawn in 1995. Regarding the present situation of ILCS, the Minister admitted that the Institute did not have the required facilities and was in need of renovation. The Institute could not be provided with better facilities and could not be renovated due to budget constraints and lack of space for expansion. However, the institute would soon be shifted to Taktsi where it will have better facilities and accommodate more students.

The Minister for Trade and Industry informed the House that in accordance with the Resolution of the 85th Session on the ban of alcohol, the Ministry had strictly enforced the ban. The Government also levied 100 % tax on import of foreign alcohol and bars within the country were also heavily taxed. The Ministry had also

made plans to increase the tax on bar license owners. The Minister said that the issue would be submitted in detail along with the submission of the Finance Report in the next session.

After the deliberations on the implementation status report of the Zhung Kalyon, the National Assembly resolved as follows:

1. That the endorsement of the Election Act would be discussed according to the Agenda during the discussion of miscellaneous issues and the Chief Election Commissioner should be invited as a special guest during the deliberation.
2. On the issue of colour of *Kabneys* for the Ministers, Councillors and community leaders that since the prerogative to award and confer red scarf (*bura marp*) was vested with His Majesty the King from ancient times it was not necessary to change the existing system. However, regarding other *Kabneys and Patangs*, the Council of Ministers should discuss and a procedure should be formulated before the establishment of parliamentary democracy and a report should be submitted in the 87th Session of the National Assembly
3. On the issue of quality of education, the National Assembly resolved that, as submitted by the Minister for Education, the Ministry should continue to rigorously implement the policies pertaining to improvement of quality of education.
4. Although the 85th National Assembly Session had resolved to ban trade fairs and gambling activities during *Tshechus* and *Wang, Lung* ceremonies, the resolutions had not been strictly implemented in some areas. Therefore, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs should direct and issue a circular and the concerned Dzongdag, Chairmen and Community leaders should take on the responsibility to strictly enforce ban on such activities.
5. As regards ban on alcohol, as submitted by the Minister for Trade and Industry, a detailed report should be submitted during the submission of the Finance Report.

Similarly, matters regarding Works and Human Settlement would be discussed according to the Agenda.

The deliberation on the Report of the implementation status of the resolutions of the 85th Session of the National Assembly concluded on 22nd December, 2006.

IV. PHYSICAL VERIFICATION REPORT BY THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

1. Report on the Chukha Dzong Construction Project and the Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project

Pursuant to Resolution VI of the 85th Session of the National Assembly, the PAC Chairman submitted the Physical Verification Report carried out by the Public Accounts Committee on the Chukha Dzong Construction Project. As per the Special Audit Report, there had been an overpayment of Nu. 3.110 million by the Dzongkhag Administration to the consultant towards supervision charges and for estimates not prepared by the consultant. However, while carrying out the verification, the PAC found that there was an excess payment of Nu. 1.468 million only. The PAC Chairman reported that there was a difference of Nu. 1.642 million between the amount reported by the Special Audit and the Public Accounts Committee finding. The overpayment of Nu.1.468 million towards supervision charges and for estimates not prepared by the consultant was to be refunded to the Government. The PAC Chairman reported that although shortages of construction materials were minimal, a total loss of Nu. 66.115 million was incurred due to inadequate co-ordination and monitoring mechanism by the concerned Ministry and the Project Management, inapt professional services provided by the consultant, lack of proper communication and primarily on account of time and cost over run due to deferment of the construction works.

The Public Accounts Committee therefore opined that the concerned Ministry and the Project Management were responsible for the above loss. It was submitted that the decision makers who decided to defer the construction works were also

responsible. However, since the decision to defer the construction works were made by the Cabinet keeping in mind the future stability of the Dzong and in the larger interest of the public, the Committee was not able to arrive at a concrete decision regarding the accountability of the total loss that was incurred. Therefore, the PAC Chairman submitted that the members thoroughly deliberate the issue and conclude on an appropriate resolution.

The PAC Chairman presented the summary of significant findings of the Public Accounts Committee on the Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project. He submitted that the Special Audit Report reflected a total expenditure of Nu. 9.426 million as on the date the project activities were transferred. However, on verifying, the Committee found that there had been a total expenditure of Nu. 9.141 million only.

The Chairman submitted that there was a difference of Nu. 0.290 million between the amount reported by the Special Audit and as found by the Public Accounts Committee. The initial works on the installation of the *Utse* and *Jamtho* were completed with a total expenditure of Nu. 7.289 million. Initially, it was felt that grave financial losses were incurred to the Government due to inadequate co-ordination and monitoring mechanism by the concerned Ministry and the Project Management, inapt professional services provided by the consultant and lack of proper communication. However, on careful verification, it was found that the entire amount reflected as loss was the expenditure incurred for the Dzong renovation works. The PAC Chairman reported that 13,000 days of contributed *Woola* by the public of Thimphu Dzongkhag were ineffectual, and that it was indeed the real loss.

On reviewing the rationality of the site selection for the *Drasha* construction, the PAC Chairman reported that no written records showing the division of land between Semtokha Dzong and Institute of Language and Cultural Affairs was available. The Committee concluded that the land was registered under the Semtokha Dzong and suitable plots of land were available above the Dzong and

also in the area surrounding the Dzong. However, the Committee opined that since the area of land at Baap Nyizergang was substantial, the *Drasha* at Baap Nyizergang could accommodate a larger scale of activity with the future establishment of religious institutes. The PAC Chairman submitted that the members thoroughly deliberate the issue and come to an appropriate resolution.

While deliberating on the two reports on 25.12.2006, members pointed out that although the report contained detailed findings of the physical verification carried out by the Committee, the report had not fixed accountability and liability on individuals responsible for the financial loss. The members questioned the Committee's basis and authority for exonerating the liability and accountability which had been established by the Special Audit Report. The concerned authorities who were responsible for the financial loss to the Government should be held liable in accordance with the laws. The members questioned the discrepancies between the findings in the Special Audit Report and the PAC Report. The members drew ironical inferences of the Special Audit Report to that of a fierce tiger, and the PAC Report to that of a cat.

The Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members of the PAC accordingly submitted clarifications and justifications on the queries raised by the members on the Chukha Dzong Construction Project. The Committee reiterated that it carried out its responsibilities fairly, transparently and sincerely without any prejudices in accordance with the directives of the National Assembly. The Committee also said that since the Report had been submitted to the House, it was for the members to analyse the Report and come to a conclusion.

The Zhung Kalyon said that the Royal Advisory Council had also submitted its report on the Chukha Dzong Construction Project and the Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project on three consecutive sessions, and that there were no discrepancies between the findings in the Special Audit Report and the PAC Report. The Zhung Kalyon also said that on proper scrutiny and analysis of the

Reports, the findings of the PAC are accurate and that the two Reports are identical. Therefore, the National Assembly had no other course of action but to arrive at a concrete decision and issue a ruling on the findings.

The National Assembly noted that it was not the responsibility of the House to discuss and decide on matters pertaining to penalties for the concerned authorities and individuals who were accountable for the grave financial loss. Therefore, the National Assembly resolved that the Report on Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project and the Report on Chukha Dzong Construction Project would be submitted to His Majesty the King for further directions and necessary action. The National Assembly also resolved that copies of the Reports would also be given to the Cabinet.

The deliberation on the Report on Chukha Dzong Construction Project and the Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project concluded on 25th December, 2006.

2. Report on Financial Irregularities of 2004 and 2005

In accordance with Resolution VI of the 85th Session of the National Assembly, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee submitted the report on the financial irregularities in respect of the ministries, departments, the armed forces and autonomous agencies of the year 2004. The findings of the Public Accounts Committee were based on the Annual Audit Report of 2004. The Chairman pointed out that the Audit Report of 2004 reported a total of 350 audit findings showing financial irregularities amounting to Nu. 369.339 million, out of which Nu. 351.963 million had been recovered as on December 15, 2006. The Chairman said that 95.29% of the total amount reported by the audit of 2004 as irregular had been recovered.

Likewise, the Chairman also submitted his report on the financial irregularities in respect of the ministries, departments, the armed force and autonomous agencies of the year 2005 which were also based on the Annual Audit Report of 2005. The

Chairman submitted that the Audit Report of 2005 had reported 110 counts of irregularities amounting to Nu. 264.280 million, out of which Nu. 133.427 million had been recovered as on December 15, 2006 representing a recovery of 50.48%. The Chairman expressed appreciation to the concerned ministries, departments, armed forces and autonomous agencies for their efforts in complying with the audit findings and in settling almost 100% of the irregularities of 2004 and 50% of the reported irregularities of 2005.

The Chairman informed the Assembly that the Auditor General and the auditors of the Royal Audit Authority deserve special commendation and appreciation for their continuous support and for providing auditing guidance during the preparation of the PAC Reports. The Committee expressed profound gratitude to the Royal Audit Authority (RAA).

While deliberating on the Report of the Public Accounts Committee on 25.12.2006, some of the members said that people such as community leaders involved in the misuse of few amount of public fund were imposed severe punishment but no actions were taken against officers in the autonomous agencies misusing enormous amounts of public fund. They were only asked to repay the public fund which they had embezzled. The members submitted that this had led to the impression that different laws for different people were prevalent in the country. The members said that it was likely to create problems and difficulties in the country.

On behalf of the Royal Advisory Councillors, the Zhung Kalyon expressed appreciation to the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and members of the Public Accounts Committee for their Report, which showed that 95% of the reported irregularities of 2004 and 50% of the reported irregularities of 2005 had been resolved by the concerned Ministries, Departments, armed forces and autonomous agencies.

The National Assembly expressed satisfaction and appreciation to the Public Accounts Committee for their Report which showed that the audit findings of

irregularities of 2004 and 2005 had been complied with and much of the public funds recovered. Since the National Assembly did not have the authority to punish and impose penalties on individuals involved in financial irregularities, the National Assembly resolved that the Public Accounts Committee should prepare a prioritized list, depending on the amount involved, of unsettled cases of irregularities and a separate list of irregularities which were apparent cases of embezzlement, even if public fund involved had been recovered. The list should be presented to the Speaker, who shall in turn present the list to the Government for further directions. The National Assembly resolved that the respective Ministries should take the initiative and make every effort to settle the irregularities prior to the commencement of the new Government and before the presentation of the next Annual Audit Report. The National Assembly directed the Dzongdags and the DYT Chairmen to take the initiative and resolve the reported irregularities in their respective Dzongkhags and Geogs. The National Assembly also directed the Public Accounts Committee to submit the Status Report on the above reported irregularities during the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the PAC report on irregularities of 2004 and 2005 audit report concluded on 25th December, 2006.

V. Appointment of Independent Auditors to audit the Royal Audit Authority

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee submitted the recommendations of the Committee for the appointment of an independent auditor to audit the Audit Authority. The Chairman submitted that under Section 83 of the Audit Act of Bhutan 2006 and Section 5 (f) of the Rules of the Public Accounts Committee, the Public Accounts Committee had the responsibility to recommend the appointment of an independent auditor to audit the Royal Audit Authority. The Chairman brought the attention of the Assembly to Section 83 of the Audit Act, 2006 which provided that **“the Parliament shall appoint independent auditors drawn from**

professional firms or bodies not within the audit jurisdiction of the Authority for auditing the annual accounts of the Royal Audit Authority” and Section 5 (f) of the Rules of the Public Accounts Committee, 2006 which provided that the duties of the Committee, among others, is to **“determine and recommend an Independent Auditor for audit of the Royal Audit Authority”**. The Chairman submitted that presently the auditor identified by the Authority had been conducting the audit of the Royal Audit Authority. In this regard, the Audit Authority had identified 33 Chartered Accountants as auditors. The Chairman once again informed the Assembly that it was the responsibility of the Committee to recommend the appointment of an independent auditor to audit the Audit Authority. The Chairman requested the members to deliberate thoroughly on the recommendation and come to a concrete resolution.

Deliberating on the issue, while some of the members said that the Committee’s recommendation was indeed commendable and creditable, some members submitted that the present practice of hiring Chartered Accountants from outside the country to audit the Audit Authority should be maintained. The members pointed out that in order to audit the Audit Authority, it was important to appoint independent auditors not within the jurisdiction of the Audit Authority. However, it was equally important to appoint auditors from within the country and not from among the three auditors as identified by the Audit Authority. The members submitted that proper assessment should be carried out while appointing the auditor. Therefore, in addition to the list of three auditors as identified by the Audit Authority, the members should be distributed with a comprehensive list of auditors to enable the members to make a proper choice.

The National Assembly resolved that the list of 33 auditors would be distributed to the members and that if the members agreed, the National Assembly Secretariat would float quotation and carry out proper assessment to select and appoint the most competent auditor to audit the Royal Audit Authority for the next year.

The deliberation on the appointment of Independent Auditors to audit the Royal Audit Authority concluded on 25th December, 2006.

VI ISSUES RELATED TO DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Black Topping of Lhuentse-Dungkhar Feeder Road

The people of Kurtoe and Gangzur Geogs expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the Government for constructing the Lhuentse-Dungkhar feeder road which had immensely benefited the people of the two immediate Geogs as well as the Dzongkhag. However, the road alignment fell along steep slopes and gullies which were unstable making it difficult, especially during rainy season, for the vehicles to ply. Therefore the people of the two Geogs submitted that they would be most grateful if the road could be black-topped to mitigate the problem.

During the deliberation, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement submitted that although it was difficult for vehicles to ply during the rainy season over the Lhuentse-Dungkhar feeder road which was around 39.8 kms, vehicles travelling through the road were limited and traffic density was less. Moreover, if this road which is mere 40 kms was to be black-topped, it would cost the Government Nu. 42 million. The Minister informed the Assembly that according to the financial estimates prepared by the Planning Commission, black- topping of the existing feeder roads in the country was not a priority even in the Tenth Plan. Therefore, the Minister submitted that the proposal for the black-topping of Lhuentse-Dungkhar feeder road was not feasible.

The National Assembly, in accordance with the policy of the Government and due to lack of funds resolved that the black-topping of Kurtoe feeder road was not feasible.

The deliberation on black topping of Lhuentse-Dungkhar feeder road concluded on 25th December, 2006.

2. Taking over the Maintenance of Samdrup Jongkhar and Trashigang Highway from DANTAK by the Department of Roads.

The public of Minjey Geog under Lhuentse Dzongkhag, Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag, Khaling and Kanglung Geogs under Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that when Bhutan was still in an underdeveloped state, our hereditary Monarchs established strong bilateral relationship with our closest neighbour India. Based on the excellent relationship, the Government of India assisted in the construction and maintenance of national highways in the country. The people expressed their deep appreciation and gratitude to the Government of India for its generosity. However, considering the level of development which Bhutan had reached, the people requested the Government to take over the maintenance of the Samdrup Jongkhar - Trashigang highway from project DANTAK and entrust the responsibility to the Department of Roads in the interest of the future well-being and security of the country.

The members also expressed their gratitude to project DANTAK for maintaining the Samdrup Jongkhar-Trashigang highway. In view of the policy of self-reliance, the members submitted that it would be appropriate if the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement took over the maintenance of the highway. This would greatly benefit national contractors as well as the people by giving them employment opportunities.

Although project DANTAK had been generous enough in maintaining the Samdrup Jongkhar-Trashigang highway for more than 40 years, the people felt that it was time for the Government to take over the highway. The members also opined that the quality of Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang highway was very poor, as compared to other highways in the Kingdom, and requested the Government to discuss the issue with DANTAK officials and take over the maintenance of the highway as soon as possible. The Mongar Chimi also made submissions in support of the proposal.

The Minister for Works and Human Settlement said that the opinion expressed by the people on the quality of Samdrup Jongkhar-Trashigang highway as being poor was not true. The Minister reminded the members that the 85th Session of the National Assembly, after a comprehensive debate on the issue, had resolved that the Minister for Works and Human Settlement and Finance Minister should discuss and consider the availability of maintenance budget before any decision was taken to take over the maintenance of highway from project DANTAK. Therefore, the Minister submitted that the Assembly should adhere to the resolution as was adopted in the 85th Session.

The National Assembly resolved that the issue on the taking over of the Samdrup Jongkhar - Trashigang highway from project DANTAK should be carried out as per the Resolution of the 85th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the taking over of the maintenance of Samdrup Jongkhar – Trashigang highway from project DANTAK concluded 25th December, 2006.

3. Construction of the Farm Road / Motorable Road.

The people of Dorokha Dungkhag submitted that during the visit of the Agriculture Minister to Dorokha Dungkhag in April 2006, His Excellency, witnessing the genuine need of the people for a farm road, agreed to provide a farm road from the summit of Halalay to Dorokha Dungkhag (23-25 kms) in the Tenth Plan. Moreover, the installation of power grid lines as approved in the Tenth Plan would be possible only if a motor road was constructed. Therefore, the people requested for the construction of a motorable road, and in the event it was not feasible, the construction of a farm road.

Deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement said that in accordance with the resolution of the 81st and 82nd Sessions of the National Assembly, the Department of Roads had started the construction of the 69 kms Samtse-Phuentsholing highway. Improvement and widening of the old Samtse-Dorokha road from Samtse till Halalay was expected to be completed within the

current financial year. In keeping with the support extended by the Agriculture Ministry, the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement submitted a proposal for the construction of 7 km farm road from Halalay to Dorokha towards the end of the Ninth Plan. However, since the road was not incorporated in the Ninth Plan and the budget had not been allocated, the construction works could not be carried out. If the Finance Ministry provided the required budget, the road from Halalay to Dorokha would be constructed in the Ninth Plan. Otherwise, construction of the road would commence only in the Tenth Plan.

The National Assembly resolved that the farm road from Halalay to Dorokha should be constructed in the Ninth Plan should the Finance Ministry provide the budget and in the event the Finance Ministry was unable to support the construction owing to budgetary constraints, the farm road should be constructed in the Tenth Plan as submitted by the Minister for Works and Human Settlement.

The deliberation on Construction of the farm road / motorable road concluded on 25th December, 2006.

4. Construction of a New Road from Nanglam Dungkhag to Pemagatshel Dzongkhag and Khenadang to Nanong Geog Center and construction of Gonphu-Panbang and Ura-Shingkar Road

The public of Decheling Geog under Pemagatshel Dzongkhag submitted that in accordance with the Royal Decree, Nobugang and Decheling Geogs of Nanglam Dungkhag under Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag and Nanong Geog of Wamrong Dungkhag under Trashigang Dzongkhag had been merged with Pemagatshel Dzongkhag. Since road is one of the means of reducing poverty, the people requested the Government to construct a road from Nanglam Dungkhag to Pemagatshel Dzongkhag and from Khenadang to Nanong Geog center.

Similarly, the people of Pangkhar, Goshing, Shingkar and Bardo Geogs under Zhemgang Dzongkhag expressed their appreciation for the completion of 5 kms of Gonphu-Panbang road construction as planned in the Ninth Plan in 2004-2005.

However, the suspension of road construction due to budget constraint had been a cause of concern for the people. In this regard, though it would entail huge expenditure, the people appealed to the Government to initiate the proposed bridge construction below the confluence of Drangmey and *Mangdey chu* so that the Gonphu- Panbang road construction of 50-60 kms could be commenced from both ends.

The members submitted that, of the eight Geogs under Zhemgang Dzongkhag only two Geogs were located close to the roads and people had to walk for five to six days. Since the construction of road would benefit the people of those Geogs that were located four to five days walk from the Dzongkhag and also facilitate development through sale of agricultural products, the people submitted that the construction of road be initiated as soon as possible.

The people also expressed their appreciation to the Royal Government for considering the construction of 49 kms of road from Ura, Bumthang to Shingkar as a priority. They submitted that the construction of 45.5 kms of feeder road from Buli to Shingkar and from Shingkar to Bardo be expedited and completed in the Tenth Plan. In addition, the people submitted that the feeder road be constructed from Buli via Silambi to Dasar. This would not only benefit the people in the two Dzongkhags but would also benefit the people in the country.

The concerned Dzongda also supported the submission to change the road plan of Shingkar- Thridangbi road as reflected in the Road-Sector Master Plan to Shingkar - Bardo – Silambi – Gongdu - Gyelposhing. He said that Zhemgang Dzongkhag was the least developed and one of the remote Dzongkhags although 45 years had passed since development activities were initiated. Therefore, for the benefit of the people of the four Geogs and the security of the region, the members submitted that the construction of Gonphu-Panbang road be accorded highest priority and construction works be expedited.

While deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement said that, of the 129.5 kms of Nanglam-Pemagatshel road, 26 kms of the proposed road fell under Nanglam-Amshingwong - Sokphurongchu road. This can be covered by the construction of road between Gyelposhing and Sokphurongchu. The 13 kms of road between Pemagatshel and Khothakpa would be covered by the 10 kms road construction from Khothakpa-Khar-Tserbar next year. However, the Tsebar-Sokphurongchu had not been reflected in the Road Sector Master Plan and if the 80.5 kms of the road was constructed as a feeder road, the expenditure was expected to amount to Nu. 550 million. Studies had also not been carried out to confirm the feasibility of the construction of the road.

The Minister said that since the above mentioned 80.5 kms of road was not reflected in the Plan, the possibilities of its construction could not be confirmed at the moment. The Minister explained that the entire 129.5 kms of road from Pemagatshel to Nanglam could not be constructed in the Tenth Plan. The Minister also informed the Assembly that the 45 kms of road from Khenadang to Nanong was not included in the Road Sector Master and a total expenditure of Nu. 258.5 had been estimated.

In accordance with the Resolution of the National Assembly, the Finance Ministry released Nu. 50 million for the construction of the 56 kms Gonphu – Panbang road. The construction of the road had started and 5 kms of the said road had been completed. In order to alleviate poverty and for the benefit of people living in the remote Geogs of Zhemgang Dzongkhag, the Ministry has plans to carry out the construction of the remaining road from both the ends to expedite the progress. The Minister also informed the Assembly that studies had already been carried out and plans had been made for the construction of a bridge over the confluence of *Mangdey Chu* and *Drangmey Chu*. However, due to the requirement of substantial budget, the Government had initiated talks with the Government of India for financial assistance. The Minister said that construction would commence as soon as possible.

The Minister informed the Assembly that although Ura-Shingkar road construction had been prioritized in the Road Sector Master Plan as a highway to provide inter-Dzongkhag connectivity, the National Assembly had resolved and directed the Ministry to construct several other highways, Dzongkhag roads and feeder roads. Hence, the Dzongkhag roads had to be excluded from the Tenth Plan.

While the construction of Buli-Shingkar road was reflected in the Road Sector Master Plan, it was not included in the Tenth Plan because the Ministry of Agriculture was responsible for the construction of farm roads and power tiller roads and there was a need for the two Ministries to work in collaboration. Moreover, the request for the construction of farm road from Nimshong to Bardo had also been submitted. The Minister said that the Ministry may not be able to carry out and fulfill all the submissions made by the people because the Ministry had to keep in mind and act in accordance with the objectives of poverty alleviation of the Tenth Plan, the National Assembly resolutions and the availability of budget with the Department of Roads. However, it was hopeful that in due course of time, all the submissions made by the people would be fulfilled, one after the other.

The Minister for Agriculture explained that although the main objective of the Agricultural policy was the expansion and growth of communication by connecting the remote Geogs and villages to the national highways through the construction of farm roads, the main impediment was the construction of bridges. For this reason, the Ministry had emphasized and initiated the construction of power tiller roads as an alternative. The Minister submitted that the Ministry would try to complete the construction of as many farm and power tiller roads as possible in the Ninth Plan and the remaining would be continued and completed in the Tenth Plan.

The Minister informed the Assembly that the Government, recognizing and acknowledging the submissions for motorable roads made by the people of Zhemgang Dzongkhag as genuine, had included the construction of roads from Tseldang to Buli to Nimshong and from Khomshar to Bardo in the plan. Although

the budget for the construction of road from Tseldang to Buli had been allocated and the construction ceremoniously inaugurated, the actual construction of the road had not yet begun. This was a matter of great concern for the Ministry because it would impede the construction of Nimshong road. Therefore it was imperative for the Dzongkhag Administration to expedite the work for the benefit of the people.

The National Assembly resolved that since the submissions were made by the people of remote Geogs, it was imperative for the Government to support their submissions and include them in the Tenth Plan. The National Assembly noted that it was indeed a failure on the part of the Dzongkhag Administration for not having started the construction works although it had been incorporated in the Plan and budget had already been released. The members were cautioned that immediate and stern action would be taken if there were similar failures and lapses in future. The National Assembly reminded the members that the Government had always been working towards the welfare of the people and that in future too, the Government should continue to provide special support to the submissions made by the people of the two Dzongkhags by incorporating them in the Plan and working towards fulfilling the needs of the people.

The deliberation on the construction of road from Nanglam Dungkhag to Pemagatshel Dzongkhag and Khenadang to Nanong Geog Center and construction of Gonphu-Panbang and Ura-Shingkhari road concluded on 25th December, 2006.

5. Establishment of Hydro Power Plant

The people of Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag and Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that they would be grateful if the Government could establish a hydro power plant at Kholongchu under Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag. The establishment of hydro power plant would not only benefit the people of the six eastern Dzongkhags but also create employment opportunities for the unemployed youth and generate revenue for the country. The submission was supported by a Royal Advisory Councillor and Chimis from Mongar and Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhags.

Deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Trade and Industry informed the Assembly that the establishment of the hydro power plant at Kholongchu had been identified as the sixth power plant among power projects earmarked for establishment. For the construction of such projects, there were numerous preliminary works such as preparation of project report, survey and investigation of the site that needed to be carried out. For this reason, the construction of the power plant at Kholongchu had been proposed to be undertaken only in the Tenth Plan. Although the economic viability and revenue generation from the Kurichu Project was marginal, His Majesty, with assistance from the Government of India, initiated the construction of the Project for the benefit of the six eastern Dzongkhags and for the socio-economic development of eastern Bhutan. Today the Project had proved beneficial to ten Dzongkhags. The construction of power plants is a business undertaking wherein profit and revenue should precede other concerns. Therefore, although there were many sites in the country which had the potential of generating hydro power, priority should be given to those power projects which can generate more revenue and profit. The Minister informed the Assembly that a detailed plan to carry out survey and investigations for the construction of a hydro power plant on the *Chamkhar Chu*, *Kheng Diga Lha Chu*, and the two rivers below the Daga Dzong had already been prepared.

To prevent shortages of electricity in the country, transmission lines connecting Basochu, Kurichu and Tala Hydro Project through Wangdiphodrang Dzongkhag had been suspended. The Minister informed the House that in the Ninth Plan, 12,000 households in the rural areas had been provided with electricity. Similarly, in the Tenth Plan another 25,000 household would be electrified. By the end of the entire rural electrification plan, more than 84% - 90% of the Bhutanese would have access to electricity.

The National Assembly expressed commendation and applauded the Ministry of Trade and Industry for their genuine efforts in the establishment of hydro power plants and distribution of electricity in the country. The National Assembly resolved that since the submissions made by the people had already been included

in the Government plans, the construction of the Kholongchu as well as other power plants should be commenced in the Ninth and Tenth Plan period for the benefit of the people.

The deliberation on establishment of hydro power plant concluded on 25th December, 2006.

6. Fixing Schedule for Pemagatshel Dzong Re- location

The people of Zobel and Shumar Geogs of Pemagatshel Dzongkhag submitted that issues relating to the Pemagatshel Dzong re-location and the town plan had been extensively discussed in the past Assembly sessions. Although the Government, in accordance with the past resolutions of the National Assembly, had identified four sites for re-location of the Dzong, the actual schedule for its relocation was yet to be finalized. Therefore, the people of Pemagatshel Dzongkhag submitted that the date and place for relocation of the Dzong and the town in the Tenth Plan should be finalized by the 86th Session of the National Assembly.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs informed the Assembly that although relocation of the Pemagatshel Dzong and town had been extensively discussed, a suitable place for relocation was yet to be determined. One of the reasons which delayed the relocation was the presence of ULFA militants in the Dzongkhag. However, from amongst the four sites identified, Denchi was found to be the most suitable. In obedience to the command of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, Denchi was identified as the place for relocation of the Dzong and town. Thereafter, the Council of Ministers issued directives to the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs and the Ministry for Works and Human Settlement to draw up and submit plans and proposals for relocation of the Dzong and town before 2007. Therefore, the Minister said that he was hopeful that relocation works would commence by the beginning of the Tenth Plan.

The National Assembly resolved that since the Government had identified the site for the relocation of the Dzong and town, the work should start according to the work plan by the beginning of the Tenth Plan.

The discussion on fixing schedule for Pemagatshel Dzong relocation concluded on 25th December, 2006.

7. Construction of Air strip

The people of the Bartsham Geog of Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that people in the eastern region faced hardship while travelling due to snow and ice in winter and rain and landslides in summer. The members were also reminded about the tremendous hardship which people faced while travelling through Assam in India. Therefore, to promote balanced economic development and tourism, and at the same time to prevent the youth from migrating to urban areas, the people submitted that an airstrip be constructed at the location falling between Thongja and Zeythong which measures 2.5 kms approximately of plain areas and has favourable climatic conditions.

Supporting the submissions made by the people of Bartsham Geog, members said that construction of an airstrip by the Government would not only solve the difficulties faced by the people of the eastern region while travelling, but would also help in transporting and referring the seriously ill patients for timely medical aid. The members also requested for a brief update from the Ministry of Information and Communication and Ministry of Trade and Industry on the establishment of helicopter services in the country and promotion of tourism as resolved during the last Session of the National Assembly.

The Minister for Information and Communication informed the House that pursuant to the discussions in the 85th Session regarding the establishment of an airstrip in the eastern Dzongkhags, the Ministry, with assistance from the Swedish Government, had identified three locations in Phuntsholing, Bumthang and Yonphula. To carry out feasibility studies, the experts from Sweden would be

arriving in the country in April and May 2007. Since the location in Bartsham as a site for the construction of an airstrip had been reported as favourable, the Ministry, in accordance with the report of the experts, would start the construction of the airstrip in the Tenth Plan.

The National Assembly expressed appreciation to the Ministry for considering the problems faced by the people of the eastern Dzongkhags and for approving the construction of an airstrip. The National Assembly noted that construction of an airstrip or helicopter services would promote tourism and increase the number of tourists visiting the eastern region. This would in turn increase the income of the people. Therefore, the National Assembly resolved that the concerned Ministry, after consulting the experts and considering their report, should commence the construction of the airstrip by the beginning of the Tenth Plan.

The deliberation on the construction of an airstrip concluded on 25th December, 2006.

8. New Town Plan at Rinchen Thang (Alabari)

The people of Nobugang Geog under Pemagatshel Dzongkhag submitted that in keeping with the pace of development, a new cement factory was to be established at Nanglam Dungkhag and the construction of the Nanglam-Gyelposhing highway had also been approved. With the establishment of the cement industry and construction of the new highway, there was a need to expand Nanglam town. Therefore, the people submitted that the proposal to situate the new town at Rinchen Thang known as Alabari be approved in consideration of the welfare of the people in the eastern region.

Deliberating on the issue, the representative of Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted that with the establishment of the cement industry and construction of the new highway from Nanglam to Gyalposhing, Rinchen Thang would become a major industrial estate. Moreover, the plans to construct a railway line from Patsala would make Nanglam a major trading center for the people of the

eastern Dzongkhags. Therefore, as submitted by the people, if the Government finalized the location of the new town, both the Government and the traders would be greatly benefited. Since Rinchen Thang lies close to the border, there was a need for the Government to carry out proper investigation before any decision is taken.

The Minister for Trade and Industry said that Nanglam would become a major meeting point of the people of many Dzongkhags and therefore had the potential to become an important urban center. The Minister also informed the members that Bhutan and India had signed an agreement to establish one of the biggest cement industries at Dungsam and project DANTAK had also issued a letter with direction to start the work as soon as possible. The Minister said that Nanglam town would become the third biggest town in the country because of its vast area and therefore, Rinchen Thang was the most appropriate location for the new town.

The Minister for Works and Human Settlement said that although Nanglam had the potential of becoming a major town, a proper development plan could not be prepared due to security reasons as Nanglam is located very close to the border. As submitted in the 85th Session, with financial assistance from the World Bank and in accordance with the draft National Urbanization Study, preliminary works had already been initiated. Since the security situation in Nanglam had returned to normalcy, the project related works would commence as soon as possible.

The National Assembly noted that the establishment of the cement industry in Nanglam Dungkha had the potential to transform Nanglam into a major trading hub and boost trade with India. Therefore, the National Assembly resolved that the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement should carry out all the necessary investigations and studies of the identified site with regard to the security situation, the expected population, the benefit and problems of the people and the like and submit the report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on new town plan at Rinchen Thang concluded on 25th December, 2006.

9. Construction of New Bridge for Pasakha Industrial

Estate

The Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on behalf of the business community, submitted that the bridge at Pasakha Industrial Estate which was damaged by floods a few years back can carry only about 12 tons of loads. Since the daily transport to and from the industry exceeds load of 25 tons per truck, the business community requested the Government to construct a bridge with a load capacity of 25 tons as soon as possible for the benefit of the industrial community.

In response, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement informed the House that although project DANTAK had initially built the Pasakha bridge to withstand load capacity of 24 tons, due to age and due to the damage caused by the flood, the load capacity of the bridge had downgraded to 15 tons. The Government was aware of the problem and has constantly been pursuing the issue with project DANTAK. The project DANTAK had given assurance to repair the damaged bridge and enhance its load capacity to 24 tons before the start of the monsoon season. However, it was only a temporary arrangement to be used till 2007. The Ministry has drawn up plans to build a new bridge with a load capacity of 70 tons by the beginning of 2008. The Minister also informed the House that the construction of the new road, which has already begun, has necessitated the construction of two new bridges. Once these bridges were built, one of the new bridges would benefit the industrial estate and solve all their transportation problems.

The National Assembly noted the submission made by the Minister of Works and Human Settlement on the up-gradation of the load capacity of the existing bridge to 24 tons before the monsoon season and further directed the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement to commence the construction of the new bridge in close consultation with project DANTAK.

The deliberation on the construction of new bridge for Pasakha Industrial Estate concluded on 26th December, 2006.

10. Up-gradation of Yebelaptsa Hospital.

The people of Trong and Nangkhör Geogs under Zhemgang Dzongkhag submitted that the Government, considering the welfare of the people of Trongsa, Bumthang and Zhemgang Dzongkhags, had established a hospital at Yebelaptsa. The hospital had benefited not only the people of Zhemgang Dzongkhag but also the people of the neighbouring Dzongkhags. However, with the shifting of the Referral Hospital to Gelephu, the people were facing difficulties in getting treatment on time because it is located three to four days walk from the Geogs. Moreover, the facilities in the hospital had also diminished and relegated. Therefore, the people submitted that the hospital be up-graded back to a Regional Referral Hospital in the interest of the three central Dzongkhags. The people also submitted that if up-gradation was not possible, the existing facilities of the hospital be retained and a gynaecologist be posted to the hospital at the earliest.

In support of the submissions made by the people, one of the Royal Advisory councillors said that when it was a Regional Referral Hospital, it had all the modern facilities and had benefited the people immensely. Although the hospital, which had benefited the people, had been shifted to Gelephu in accordance with the Health policy, the member submitted that the Health Ministry should either retain it as a Referral Hospital or in the event it was not possible, provide all the facilities and support in order to mitigate the difficulties faced by the people.

The Health Minister informed the House that the hospital was initially established as a referral hospital of the Dzongkhag because there were many leprosy patients in the country at that time and the hospital served as a leprosy treatment centre. Although the hospital had been shifted, additional eye treatment unit had been established in the hospital. In accordance with the submissions made by the people of Zhemgang Dzongkhag, the Minister gave assurance that a gynaecologist would be posted to the hospital.

The Prime Minister added that although the Government had drawn up plans to establish a Regional Referral Hospital in Gelephu, due to the unfavourable security situation in Gelephu the Referral Hospital had to be established at Yebelaptsa. After the security situation in Gelephu returned to normalcy, the hospital was shifted to Gelephu in 2003 as per the plan. The shifting of the hospital to Gelephu was given due consideration because Gelephu not only had large population but was also centrally located with its proximity to Tsirang, Dagana, Zhemgang, Trongsa, and Bumthang Dzongkhags. The patients from these Dzongkhags could be referred to Gelephu on time for any medical treatment. The Prime Minister also informed that the Government had plans to upgrade and provide proper facilities to all the hospitals, whether big or small, under Zhemgang Dzongkhag.

The National Assembly resolved that the establishment of the Regional Referral Hospital at Gelephu should be carried out in accordance with the plan. The Assembly also directed the Ministry of Health to post a gynaecologist to Yebelaptsa hospital as submitted by the people.

The deliberation on up-gradation of Yebelaptsa hospital concluded on 26th December, 2006.

11. Construction of Quarters for Patient Escorts

The people of Chukha Dzongkhag, expressing their gratitude to the Government for establishing hospitals in the Dzongkhags which had benefited the people immensely, submitted that the escorts of patients referred to JDWNRH from the Dzongkhags who did not have relatives in Thimphu faced accommodation problem. Therefore, the people requested the Government to construct quarters for the escorts considering the welfare of the people. The people submitted that such problems and difficulties existed in other Dzongkhags too. Therefore, it was also requested that quarters for the escorts be constructed in the Dzongkhags and a system of charging rent or fee be initiated. It was suggested that payment of rent

should be made compulsory for those who can afford but that it should be waived off for those escorts who cannot.

The Prime Minister said that although the Government was aware of the accommodation problem faced by the escorts, the Government did not initiate the construction of quarters for the escorts because the Government, with a limited budget, had to give due importance and priority to patients than to escorts. The Government expends considerable amounts of money every year in referring the terminally ill patients outside the country for treatment. Moreover, the Government, with a limited budget, has to establish a number of regional referral hospitals in the country. Therefore, the construction of escort quarters was not feasible due to lack of finance. For the construction of quarters for the patient escorts, the Prime Minister suggested that people should initiate programmes to collect donations and contributions from people who are economically and financially affluent.

The Deputy Speaker and a Royal Advisory Councillor submitted that although construction of the quarters by collecting donations from the rich and the affluent would benefit those poor people who came to Thimphu as escorts, the collection of donations and contributions would create problems once we start parliamentary democracy. Therefore, even if the submissions of the people could not be given consideration and realized immediately due to lack of funds, the Government should determine and find out ways and means to reflect the proposals in the plans of the Government.

The National Assembly resolved that since the establishment of parliamentary democracy would entail huge expenditure on the part of the Government, the construction of the quarters for the escorts of the patients was not feasible due to lack of funds. The Government and the Ministry of Health should arrange to seek foreign aid from friendly countries. The Ministry of Finance should provide support and financial assistance. The House also resolved that financial assistance in the

form of donations should be sought from the private sector so that the construction of the quarters is commenced before the end of the Ninth Plan.

The deliberation on construction of quarters for patient escorts concluded on 26th December 2006.

12. Restoration of Vandalized and Dilapidated Choetens

The people of Samdrup Jongkhar and Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhags submitted that there were many vandalized and dilapidated Choetens which have been robbed of their *Zungs*. It is believed that leaving these Choetens in such conditions would gather bad *Karma* and bring about famine and epidemic in the country. It was therefore imperative that the people and the Dratshang work together to restore and renovate such Choetens. Since there are certain regulations whereby the permission of the Government is required for renovation of such Choetens it has proved to be a bottle neck to those affluent individuals who can afford and wanted to renovate such Choetens. Therefore, the people submitted that the existing policy be changed.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs informed the House that if the restoration works did not involve a total alteration in the design, the Dzongkhag Administration had the authority to accord approval. However, it was important to involve few elders of the community to list down the *Zungs* of the Choetens during its renovation.

The Dratshang representative submitted that Choetens in the country had been built by our forefathers for many different reasons. The peace and prosperity of the people and the country would be greatly hampered if these Choetens were not renovated and restored to its original glory. It was therefore indispensable to renovate these dilapidated Choetens. The member submitted that Dratshang would provide guidance for any restoration works, but could only assist in providing ordinary and less expensive *Zungs*. The Dratshang was constrained by lack of funds for elaborate and expensive *Zungs*. The member also submitted that installation of

elaborate *Zungs* might have to be carried out with financial assistance from the Dzongkhag Administration.

Some of the members submitted that the number of Choetens in each Geogs should be listed down and handed over to the concerned Cultural Officer in the Dzongkhag. A Committee comprising of the Dzongdag, Lam Neten, Drangpon and Superintendent of Police should be formed to co-ordinate and carry out the renovations of the dilapidated Choetens. The members submitted that the House should pass a resolution requiring the Committee so formed to carry out the renovations within three months. Some of the members submitted that it would not be appropriate to include Drangpon as a member of the Committee and that there was an urgent need to frame proper rules and regulations with detailed procedures for the renovation of the Choetens.

The National Assembly resolved that since it was imperative to restore, renovate and take care of the Choetens in the country, a Committee comprising of the Dzongdag, Lam Neten, DYT and GYT Chairmen, Gup and Chimi should be formed and the Committee should start the renovation works as soon as possible. As submitted, the Dratshang should provide and support the installation of *Zungs*. However, if there are requirements for large number of *Zungs* with huge financial implications, the Dzongkhag Administration should assist the Dratshang in the procurement and installation of the *Zungs*. The National Assembly also resolved that if there was a need for major changes in the original design of the Choeten, prior approval should be sought from the Department of Culture.

The deliberation on restoration of vandalized and dilapidated Choetens concluded on 26th December, 2006

VII. BHUTAN-CHINA BOUNDARY TALKS

The people of Gasa and Haa Dzongkhags submitted that the Government should expedite and finalize the demarcation of the northern boundary keeping in mind the

submissions made in the past sessions of the National Assembly. The demarcation would reassure the people living along the border areas and would further strengthen the sovereignty and security of the country. Moreover, the demarcation would strengthen the relationship between the two countries and secondly would solve the problems of Tibetans entering into Bhutan during the *Yartse Goenbuep* (Cordyceps) harvesting season.

The Secretary for International Boundary briefed the members on the progress of the boundary talks with China. He informed the Assembly that after the 85th Session of the National Assembly, 18th round was held in Beijing from 17-18 August 2006. It was agreed that the Chinese Expert Group level would come to Thimphu at a mutually convenient date next year to discuss and narrow down the differences between the two claim lines. In addition, as directed by the 84th Session of the National Assembly, Bhutan had signed 62 strip maps covering entire boundary of Bhutan-India excluding the two eastern and western tri-junctions.

The National Assembly commended the Secretary for International Boundary and the Foreign Ministry for the achievements made in the demarcation of the northern boundary and for signing of the 62 strip maps between Bhutan and India. The National Assembly further instructed that it was imperative to hold border talks based on Government policies, directives of His Majesty the King, past resolutions of the National Assembly and the submissions made by the people.

The deliberation on Bhutan-China boundary talks concluded on 26th December, 2006.

VIII. ISSUES RELATED TO PEOPLE IN THE CAMPS IN NEPAL.

The people of Mongar Dzongkhag, Kabisa and Limbukha Geogs of Punakha Dzongkhag and Bartsam Geog of Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that if the people who had revolted against the *Tsa-Wa-Sum* and left the country were allowed to come back, there would be negative implications on the peace, prosperity and

security of our country. Therefore, the people requested the National Assembly to pass a resolution not to permit such people back in our country. The people also requested the Government to brief the House on the talks held between the governments of Bhutan and Nepal after the Bhutanese officials were violently assaulted by the anti-nationals stationed in Jhapa. The widespread rumours that the anti-nationals were returning to the country in 2008 was indicative of the fact that the existing Citizenship Act of Bhutan was being repealed. Therefore, the members submitted that the Citizenship Act of Bhutan should be strictly enforced by the Government.

With the decentralization policy of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, the nation had witnessed and experienced significant and unprecedented changes. The proper implementation of this farsighted policy of His Majesty had laid firm foundation and set the right direction for the development of the country. However, the people in the camps in Nepal continued to pose security threat to the country. Though the United States had been generous enough to resettle them in the United States, they had turned down the offer and still insist on returning to Bhutan. Looking at this stand, it was evident that the people in the camps in Nepal are fully intended on creating continued problem in the Kingdom. Therefore, the people urged the Government not to accept them back into the country.

Deliberating on this issue, the representatives of the people reminisced that so much of chaos and disorder were created in the country when these ungrateful people of southern Bhutan decided to leave the country in 1990. At the time of such unexampled chaos, His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo personally visited and explained to them that leaving one's own country to live in another country was very hard and that they would face obstacles and hardships. His Majesty appealed to His people to stay back in the country. Disregarding His Majesty's repeated appeals, these people said that they were going to stay back in the country only if the Mawokhola river flowed backward towards its source. They not only spoke and acted against the laws and policies of the country, but also destroyed properties and

vital infrastructures before they absconded from the country. Therefore, the representatives of the people urged the Government not to accept them back in the country at any cost.

When these depraved and dishonourable people who left the country at their own will appealed to return, the Government magnanimously accepted the plea and formed a Joint Verification Team consisting of members from both the governments. But while conducting the verification in the camps, the Bhutanese officials were violently assaulted. Therefore, the representatives repeatedly appealed that they should never be allowed to come back into the country. The Assembly was also reminded that if they were to come back into the country, they cannot be granted citizenship as per the Citizenship Act of Bhutan and they are liable to be punished in accordance with the Bhutan Penal Code. The representatives of the people also urged the Government to honour and work in conformity with the agreements made earlier.

The Prime Minister informed the Assembly that the Joint Verification Team, with members from both the countries, was formed after thorough discussion with the Government of Nepal. On 22nd December 2003, when the verification team from Bhutan were explaining the Government laws and procedures to the people in the camps, they were violently assaulted by the camp residents. Thereafter, the Nepal Government was approached and informed of the assault on the Bhutanese Officials. Since then, the two governments had been meeting and maintaining contact regularly at the ministerial level to discuss the issue.

The House was informed that the Prime Minister had met the Nepalese Foreign Minister in September 2005 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York to break the stalemate. Bhutan offered to take back those in Category 1 (C1) and Category 4 (C4) from Khudunabari camp who chose to return to Bhutan. The Ministerial Joint Committee had categorized people found to be forcibly evicted

from Bhutan under C1 and Bhutanese who had committed criminal acts under C4 category.

In November 2005, on the sidelines of the 13th SAARC Summit in Dhaka, Bhutan had proposed for the Joint Verification Team members of the two countries to visit the camps to explain the terms and procedures to the people and to collect applications of those opting to return. In order to carry out the work and solve the problem in a fair and transparent manner, the Prime Minister, reaffirming and in accordance with the agreements reached in the past Ministerial Joint Committee on the terms and procedures, proposed the incorporation of clauses in a joint Communiqué or any other written form. The Foreign Minister of Nepal did not agree to the incorporation of such clauses in a joint Communiqué or any other written form. The need for incorporation of the clauses in a joint Communiqué was again pursued with the Foreign Minister of Nepal through written and telephonic contacts. But the Nepal Foreign Minister maintained the same position and would not agree to the incorporation. The Prime Minister also said that the Government had been working to move the bilateral process forward but the political changes in Nepal had been an impediment to the smooth process of the bilateral talks.

The Prime Minister informed the Assembly that the Prime Minister had met the present Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal in September 2006 on three occasions in Kuala Lumpur, Dhaka and in New York. In these meetings, the Government of Nepal introduced a new element by stating that the problem was between Bhutan and the camp people and not between Bhutan and Nepal, and that Bhutan should talk directly to the people in the camps. The Government of Nepal had even stated in the press that it would not abide by the past agreements reached between the two governments and that all the people in the camps had to be repatriated.

The Government of Nepal stated that they had only given asylum to the people on humanitarian grounds and that they can only facilitate to resolve the problem. The

Nepalese Government had also stated that it was not its responsibility to solve the problem and that the prime onus to resolve the stalemate lied with Bhutan. The Prime Minister informed the Assembly that the Government of Nepal wanted to make a fresh start by doing away with the past agreements. Bhutan could not accept the new position of the Government of Nepal. The two governments had agreed from the beginning of the talks in 1993 that they were in the best position to find a solution to the problem through bilateral process. The Royal Government and the successive governments in Nepal had always reiterated their commitment to the bilateral process. Furthermore, the Prime Minister stated that most of the people living in the camps were not Bhutanese and it would neither be useful nor practical to talk to the people in the camps directly. The camps had been infiltrated by Maoist elements, and several radical parties such as the Bhutan Communist Party, Bhutan Gorkha National Liberation Front and the Bhutan Revolutionary Students Union have been formed with the declared objective of carrying out armed struggle to overthrow the Royal Government of Bhutan.

Moreover, it was the Government of Nepal that established the camps and sought UNHCR assistance in 1991 when there were only 304 persons claiming to be Bhutanese. Until mid-1993 all ethnic Nepalese claiming to be Bhutanese were admitted into the camps without proper screening. The Government of Nepal's involvement is necessary as there is a clear agreement on Category 2 whereby people under this category who do not wish to return to Bhutan will be given the option to apply for Nepalese citizenship. The Government of Nepal has both moral and legal responsibility over the problem.

A letter was received from the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Nepal in October 2005 in which they reiterated the Government of Nepal's present position. The Prime Minister of Bhutan made it clear that the issue must be resolved through bilateral process and in accordance with the agreements reached between the two governments. The two governments agreed to meet in Thimphu from 20-23rd November 2006, but the talks had to be postponed on request from the

Nepal Government. The talk shall be resumed soon and the Royal Government will continue to abide by our citizenship and immigration Laws, the resolutions of the National Assembly, and the agreements reached between the two governments

The Speaker said that though the Royal Government, with the commitment and desire to resolve the issue was holding discussions, the frequent changes of the government of Nepal had been a major impediment to the process. Even if the people in the camps were allowed to come back, they should not be given citizenship at once. Before the citizenship is granted, a period of around two years should lapse during which time the Government should make proper observations with regard to their behaviour and attitude. The Speaker reminded the Assembly that the responsibility and the authority to grant citizenship was with the Government and that the Government should exercise this authority diligently.

The National Assembly resolved that the issue be resolved bilaterally based on the agreements signed between the two governments, the Citizenship Act of Bhutan and the resolutions of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the issues related to people in the camps in Nepal concluded on 26th December, 2006.

IX. LAND RELATED ISSUES

1. Payment for Cost of Excess Land

The people of Dagana, Kurtoe and Menbi Geogs under Lhuentse Dzongkhag, Gomdar and Orong Geogs of Samdrup Jongkhar Dzongkhag, the people of Trashiyangtse and Trongsa Dzongkhags, and people of Jokhar and Nangla Geogs of Zhemgang Dzongkhag requested the Government to grant *Kidu* by waiving off payment against the cost of excess land to those having land holdings of less than five acres. They also appealed that the people with land holdings of less than five acres and who had surrendered the excess land due to their inability to pay the cost of excess land be allowed to buy back the excess land at the existing Government

rate. The people also requested the Government for extension of time for the payment of cost of excess land from June 2007 to June 2008.

His Majesty the Fifth King speaking for the first time in the 86th Session of the Assembly after ascending the Golden Throne said that His Majesty was fully aware of the problems faced by the people in all the twenty Dzongkhags arising from land related issues. His Majesty the King said that He had not forgotten the submissions made by the people during his visit to the twenty Dzongkhags.

As it is the sacred duty of the King to look after the people's welfare at all times and in all respects, His Majesty said that the problems faced by the people due to land related issues and the submission made by the people would be carefully considered. Landless people most deserving of *Kidu* would be granted *Kidu* without fail. His Majesty the King commanded that no precedent should be set for people to gain *Kidu* through false means and submissions. His Majesty further commanded that the deadline for the payment of cost of excess land would be postponed.

His Majesty the King informed the Assembly that He would be visiting all the Dzongkhags to hold talks directly with the people in an effort to resolve their deepest difficulties. His Majesty the King assured the people that the matter would soon be solved and people facing genuine problems would be granted *Kidu* without fail.

The Speaker said that the Bhutanese were the most fortunate to be ruled by a King whose first consideration was the welfare of his people. The Assembly resolved that the issues on excess land and other issues related to land would be carried out in accordance with the Royal Command.

The deliberation on payment for cost of excess land concluded on 28th December, 2006.

2. Need to Expedite Land Registration

The people of Mongar Dzongkhag submitted that there was only one year left for the completion of construction activities of various sectors of the Dzongkhag and planned activities of the Geogs which are earmarked for the Ninth Five Year Plan. Since it was very important to register the land on which these development activities are carried out, the people requested the Government to expedite the land registration.

Similarly, the people of Paro Dzongkhag submitted that since 1979 many people had illegally converted *Sogshing* (tree grove reserved for collection of leaves), *Tsamdo* (pasture land), *Chhuzhing* (wet land), orchard and Government land for cultivation and to build houses. In compliance to the Executive Order of the Government, surveys and investigations on illegal land conversion and house constructions were carried out in all the twenty Dzongkhags, and detailed field reports, along with photographs of the converted land and illegal structures were submitted to the Government a long time ago. However, till now there was no specific decision from the Government on what was to be done. Because of this the Dzongkhag and Geog administrators were facing lot of problems in monitoring and controlling illegal land conversions and house constructions. Therefore, the people submitted that the Government should frame long-term rules, regulations and guidelines for immediate implementation before the adoption of parliamentary democracy in 2008.

During the deliberation, some of the members reiterated that in order to achieve the planned developmental activities of the Ninth Plan, it was imperative to finalize the identification of land and its registration. His Majesty the King, considering the welfare of the people had issued a Kasho in 1979 which regularized and allowed registration of land as *Khimsa* in the *Tharm* for those houses built before 1979. In compliance to the Orders of the Government, surveys and investigations on illegal land conversion and houses constructed after 1979 were carried out by the community leaders and detailed field reports, along with photographs of the

converted land and illegal structures were submitted to the Government. The people submitted that the Assembly should pass a resolution directing the Government to solve these problems which people had been facing before 2007 and before the end of the Ninth Plan.

The Minister for Agriculture informed the Assembly that in accordance with the Royal Command, the Government had issued directions to all the Government ministries, departments and agencies occupying Government land to get the land registered in the *Tharm*. However, most of these agencies had failed to register the land in the *Tharm*. Since it was the responsibility of the concerned agency and the Dzongkhags to process the registration of land, the Ministry of Agriculture had been reminding the concerned Agencies and the respective Dzongkhags to process the registration at the earliest to avoid future difficulties.

The Minister for Agriculture also informed the Assembly that the use of Government land or conversion and construction in *Sokshing*, *Tsamdro* and *Nyekhor Tsamdro* (community grazing land) was prohibited under the Land Act. In obedience to His Majesty's command to strictly implement and enforce the Land Act, the Ministry of Agriculture had issued several circulars. For strict compliance and implementation of the Land Act, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs constituted a committee comprising of members from the Department of Forest and Agriculture, the Dzongkhag and the GYT members. The Committee was entrusted with the responsibility to keep vigil on any illegal occupation and constructions in *Sokshing*, *Tsamdro*, Government land and *Nyingkor Tsamdro*. However, the committee so constituted had not been effective in carrying out its functions and people were not aware of the existence of such committees. The committee was authorized to directly forward offenders to respective courts in accordance with Section KA – 6 (20) of the Land Act. In addition, when the Department of Survey and Land Records was processing the new *Tharm*, it was discovered that 894 households had illegally built houses on Government land prior to 1979.

Moreover, His Majesty the King, considering the welfare of the people had commanded the regularization as *Khimsa* in the *Tharm* of those houses built after 1979 up to 2003. As per the Land Act, orchard land cannot be used for house construction. However, based on the report submitted by the Ministry on the difficulties faced by the orchard owners, His Majesty granted approval to allow construction of a single storied house within a maximum area of 10 decimals of land in the orchard.

The National Assembly resolved that the concerned agencies and departments who had not registered the land which they occupy should complete their registration before the start of the Tenth Plan. Landless people deserving of *Kidu* would be looked into as per the Royal Command. Illegal construction of house on *Sokshing*, *Tsamdro*, *Chuzing*, Orchard and Government land would be dealt with in accordance with the Land Act.

The deliberation on the need to expedite land registration and matters related to conversion of land concluded on 28th December, 2006.

3. Establishment of Land Commission

The people of Chang and Kawang under Thimphu municipality submitted that since the amendment of Land Act was under process, it was imperative to establish a Land Commission in order to solve all land related problems before the institution of parliamentary democracy.

During the deliberation, the members, including the Deputy Speaker and Royal Advisory Councillor reiterated the importance of the establishment of Land Commission before the institution of parliamentary democracy. The members raised their concern that in the years ahead, with the increasing population there would be less land holdings and the land related issues would become more complicated. The members suggested that the present Department of Survey be

made into an independent Land Commission that would be directly accountable to His Majesty the King on land issues.

The members also submitted that establishment of Land Commission was indispensable in order to streamline the procedures for transfer of *Thram* and for its smooth functioning. The members also submitted that during the amendment of the Land Act, earlier rules and procedures regarding land should be given due consideration but at the same time amendment should be made keeping in pace with the changing times.

The members also said that both the Courts and the City Corporation had the authority to transfer *Thram*. This dual system had only caused more inconvenience to the people. Therefore it was important that the Royal Government streamline the procedures and come out with a uniform procedure for transfer of *Thram*. The members also requested that a draft of the amended Land Act be distributed to the members in advance in order for the people to ensure that all the land related issues had been incorporated and taken into consideration.

The Minister for Agriculture recommended that all the issues related to land be discussed when the amended Land Act is tabled in the National Assembly before 2007. In order to ensure that proper land substitution was given to those whose land had been acquired by the Government, His Majesty the King issued a *Kasho* formally constituting a five member *Satshab* Allotment Committee under the chairmanship of the Agriculture Minister and comprising of the Secretary, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs, Secretary of the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, the Attorney General and the Surveyor General as members. Although the Committee had been doing all it could to solve the problems faced by the people, most people did not honour and accept the monetary compensation that the Government was offering. Instead, people ask for land substitution and in most of the cases people did not accept the land that was given to them as substitute. The

Minister said that the Ministry was working and making every effort towards addressing such difficulties.

His Majesty the King said that He would continue to grant *Kidu* to those facing genuine difficulties and that people had nothing to worry about. His Majesty commanded that, as submitted by the Agriculture Minister, all the land related issues should be solved based on the revised Land Act before the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 2008.

The National Assembly resolved that the members should raise the land related issues during the endorsement of the Land Act in the 87th Session of the National Assembly. The Assembly also resolved that the establishment of the Land Commission would be discussed during the endorsement of the amended Land Act in the 87th session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on establishment of Land Commission concluded on 28th December, 2006.

X. MISCELLANEOUS

1. Waste Management and Conservation Act

The people of Ura Geog submitted that it was imperative to draft a Waste Management and Conservation Act so as to enable the Government and the people to help conserve and preserve our pristine environment. It was submitted that owing to the growth of population each year, people were facing inconveniences in their efforts to conserve and preserve the environment. There was also the risk of contracting various diseases as a result of improper waste management. Therefore, the people requested the drafting of a Waste Management and Conservation Act.

While deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement reminded the Assembly that the 85th Session of the National Assembly had directed the Ministry to examine and submit a report as to whether the existing Municipality

Act would cover all the issues related to waste management in the country. The Minister informed the Assembly that the Municipality Act of 1999 was limited in its application as it did not address the issue of waste management in all the 205 Geogs of the 20 Dzongkhags. The jurisdiction of the Municipality Act of 1999 was restricted to the urban centres only.

The Minister informed the House that on August 2006, His Majesty the King commanded the drafting of a new Municipality Act. Accordingly, the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, in consultation with the National Environment Commission had decided to draft a new Waste Management and Conservation Act with assistance from the country's major environment donor agency, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Since the issue of waste management fell within the jurisdiction and responsibility of the National Environment Commission, the Ministry had submitted to the Council of Ministers that the issue should be coordinated by the National Environment Commission. Similarly, the Minister recommended that the National Assembly should delegate the responsibility of drafting the Waste Management Act to the National Environment Commission.

In order to address the growing problem of indiscriminate littering and improper waste disposal, and as directed by the Council of Ministers, the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement had prepared a National Strategy and Action Plan on Integrated Solid Waste Management. As approved by the Council of Ministers, the implementation of the programme was to start immediately through electronic and print media messages on hygiene and waste management. This was to be followed through institutional and community mobilization where public participation was the underlying principle for all implementation activities. The Minister added that the Government intended to solicit the cooperation and support of every Bhutanese citizen, particularly the people residing in urban areas, to keep our cities and towns clean.

The Deputy Minister of National Environment Commission informed the House that owing to the farsighted and visionary environmental policies initiated by His Majesty the King, the World Environment Organization awarded the 2004-2005 “Champions of the Earth Award” to His Majesty the King and the people in recognition of the efforts made in the conservation of environment. His Majesty the King was also awarded the prestigious 2006 J. Paul Getty Conservation Leadership Award by the World Wildlife Fund and this had boosted the reputation and recognition of Bhutan in the international community as a country dedicated to conservation and preservation of the environment.

Solid waste management had become an emerging environmental issue due to rapid economic development, urbanization, change in consumption patterns and change in lifestyle. Though improvements had been made with respect to waste management, many municipalities were still unable to deliver services effectively as a result of illegal dumping and indiscriminate littering of domestic wastes. In the early 1980’s, Thimphu city generated only 6-8 tons of waste in a day, while today, Thimphu city generates around 37-40 tons daily which are mostly non biodegradable.

The National Environment Commission had been conducting trainings and raising awareness on the issue of waste management. The National Environment Commission conducted a three day training for members of all the Dzongkhags. Altogether 110 members from different Dzongkhags participated in the training. In addition, several cleaning campaigns in Thimphu were being conducted by National Environment Commission and City Corporation with the help of students and residents of the city, with the hope that this would enhance awareness amongst the residents of Thimphu and that they would take initiatives to reduce and manage waste. Unfortunately, no improvements were seen on the part of Thimphu residents with regard to waste management.

In Thimphu, in order to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill, the National Environment Commission had established a small Plastic Pet Bottles crushing unit in Thimphu with the help of Bhutan Beverage Company (Coca Cola Company) and Thimphu City Corporation. The National Environment Commission, with assistance from the private sector in Paro was planning to establish a similar unit in Paro. The plastic crushing unit had been replicated recently by Trashigang Dzongkhag Administration. If other Dzongkhags and urban centres took up such initiatives, it would help reduce the volume of solid waste going into landfills and also reduce littering.

The Deputy Minister reminded the members that there were adequate environmental provisions in both the DYT and GYT Chathrim which specifically mentions about the protection of land, air and water. However, most of these wastes are thrown either on land or in the water bodies. Before littering became uncontrollable, there was a need for a legal instrument such as Anti-Littering Act or Waste Management Act. The Deputy Minister said that addressing the waste management problem should be a collective responsibility of both the Government and the people. More than strong laws, it was important for the people and the Government to work in cooperation and hand in hand. He added that although the requirement of Waste Management and Conservation Act was essential, its success depended on the mindset and attitude of the general public.

The National Assembly noted that the country was widely reputed in the international community as a country dedicated and devoted to the conservation and preservation of its pristine environment. The responsibility to protect and preserve our environment from degradation fell on the GYT and DYT members in the rural areas and on the respective City Municipalities in the urban centres. The National Assembly also noted that in addition to the Waste Management and Conservation Act, it was very essential to provide trainings on waste disposal and waste management. The National Assembly solicited the support and collective responsibility of every Bhutanese citizen on proper waste disposal and waste

management. The National Assembly resolved that the National Environment Commission should draft the Waste Management and Conservation Act for the Kingdom of Bhutan and submit the Bill during the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on Waste Management and Conservation Act concluded on 28th December, 2006.

2. Endorsement and Briefing of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan

The people of Kashi and Nisho Geogs of Wangdiphodrang Dzongkhag and eleven Geogs of Chukha Dzongkhag submitted that in keeping with the profound vision of His Majesty the King on the process of decentralization and for the introduction of parliamentary democracy in 2008, it was important to enact the Election Act before any training was conducted on and about the election process. As resolved by the 85th Session of the National Assembly, the Election Bill should be adopted in the 86th Session. Difficult circumstances can be avoided if the Election Bill is endorsed before the election processes actually began. The people also asked the basis and legality of holding elections without the Election Act.

Deliberating on the issue, the Royal Advisory Councillor, the Deputy Speaker and the members submitted that the present National Assembly comprising of the King, the Ministers and the representatives of the people was more representative than the future Parliament. Therefore, the Election Bill should be endorsed in the current Session. The members said that all their concerns would be unclouded if a copy of His Majesty's *Kasho* on the issue, if there were any, was distributed to the members. The members said that, as in the past, they would always revere and abide by His Majesty's Command. The members also said that the election training being conducted by the Election Commission on election process and procedures gave the members a feeling that it was contradictory to our tradition and culture.

The Chief Election Commissioner informed the Assembly that that as per the command of His Majesty the King, the Election Bill was to be enacted by the new Parliament in 2008 and not by the 86th Session of the National Assembly. In a parliamentary democracy, only the Parliament has the authority to enact the laws under the Constitution. Since the people of Bhutan had already endorsed the Draft Constitution, the endorsement of the draft Constitution or the Election Bills by the present Assembly was not necessary. According to Article 10, Section 1 of the Draft Constitution, all the legislative power is vested in the Parliament which would consist of His Majesty the King, the National Council and the National Assembly. The National Council and the National Assembly, as defined by the Draft Constitution would come into existence only in 2008 after the first parliamentary elections. As the only existing pillar of Parliament, as laid down in the draft Constitution, the Druk Gyalpo is the competent authority, at this juncture for approving the drafts as well as implementation of the Election Bills and regulations that are necessary for electing the new Parliament in 2008.

The Chief Election Commissioner also said that the Election Bill, the National Referendum Bill, and the Public Election Fund Bill were based on Articles 23, 16, 15 and 32 of the Draft Constitution. These Bills and the election related rules, regulations and guidelines had been drafted under the direct command of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. Therefore, there should be no misgivings or doubts on these Bills forming the basis on which the first parliamentary elections would be conducted in 2008. The Bills would then be enacted and the Constitution itself would be adopted by the new Parliament in 2008 completing the process of establishing parliamentary democracy in Bhutan.

For the welfare and long term interest of the country, His Majesty had entrusted the responsibility to the Election Commission for the successful conduct of the first elections. The Commissioner pledged before the Assembly that in accordance with the Royal Command, the Commission would conduct the elections in the most free, fair and transparent manner. The Election Commissioner also said that in order to

have a successful and meaningful parliamentary democracy as envisioned by His Majesty, it was very important that the honourable members provided their support in the preparations for the historic elections in 2008.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that the Election Bills were distributed to the members for information and awareness in preparation for the elections in 2008 and not for discussion as per His Majesty's command. The Parliament in 2008 would be more credible because it would be made of the National Assembly, National Council and the Druk Gyalpo. Therefore, the Election Bill enacted by the future Parliament would have more legitimacy. The Home Minister also said that till now, the Government and the people had always revered and abided by His Majesty's command and that the Government would pledge support and revere the present command of the Druk Gyalpo.

The Royal Advisory Councillor, the Deputy Speaker and the members submitted that the requirement of an academic qualification of a university degree to become a member of the Parliament was not appropriate considering the present literacy rate in the country. For one to serve the country, loyalty and dedication were more important than educational qualification. Bhutan being a Buddhist country, it was vital to give opportunity to people who are educated and possess a university degree in Buddhist education.

The members added that if the minimum qualification required for one to be a member of parliament was a university degree, only 2 % will be favoured and 98% of the population will be deprived of their rights. It was also contradictory to His Majesty's wise policy of One Nation, One People and the emphasis laid by His Majesty on dress and national language for a unified country. Even with regard to the university degree, some students acquired their university degree because of their intellectual capacity while others obtained because of their wealth. Therefore, even the youths who had passed their primary school should be given the same opportunity based on their competency and ability. The members also said that public campaign financing should be given due consideration and that a ceiling

should be fixed for such campaign fund before the introduction of parliamentary democracy. It must also be ensured that the revered institution of monarchy is always protected and preserved.

The Chief Election Commissioner said that although people repeatedly pleaded His Majesty to continue with the present system of governance, His Majesty the Fourth King decided to introduce parliamentary democracy for the security, sovereignty and well being of the people. Therefore, it was very important to elect competent parliamentarians who are able to raise Bhutan's stature and image abroad and at the same time fulfil the aspirations of the people. The Chief Election Commissioner refuted that most Bhutanese graduates were urban based and knew little of rural life and was therefore not suitable to represent the interest of the people. Almost all the educated Bhutanese maintained their links with their original homes and contributed to the social and cultural life in their villages and were familiar with the *Kidus* of the rural population.

There was no truth in the argument that the qualification requirement of a university degree for parliamentarians favoured only 2% of the population and deprived 98 % of the people of their rights. Out of 400,000 eligible voters, there were 245,000 people between 25-65 years of age eligible to stand for election. Out of this, 50,000 would have to be discounted since royal family members, religious personalities and ordained members of religious institutions, civil servants and armed forces are required to remain apolitical under the draft Constitution. There were 195,000 people who can stand for election and therefore, the percentage of eligible candidates for Parliament had to be seen in relation to this figure.

For parliamentary election, people are required to elect no more than 75 candidates to the National Assembly and 20 candidates to the National Council. Hence, the electorate would not face any problems in electing 95 well educated candidates to Parliament. The Commissioner added that today, the minimum requirement for even drivers and peons are class X passed. Therefore, it would become a serious

setback if the Ruling Party and the Opposition Party of the Parliament did not have qualified and capable members.

The academic qualification for members of Parliament was a must because the cabinet ministers and members must be able to converse without the help of interpreters when meeting their counterparts. The leaders of the rich and powerful countries, who did not know the international language, face great difficulties in conversing and expressing their thoughts. For a small country like Bhutan, it was important that such difficulties are addressed. The Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislature are the three branches of the Government. With the requirement of LLB and LLM degrees for future members of the judiciary and the emergence of an increasingly well qualified civil service, it would become a serious setback for the future of good governance in Bhutan if the cabinet and the two Houses of the Parliament did not have qualified and capable members.

The Chief Election Commissioner informed the Assembly that although he was not in possession of the *Kasho*, His Majesty the King had commanded the deferment of the enactment of the Election Bill by future Parliament after considering the well-being of the future generations. The provisions relating to political parties in the Election Bills were based on the provisions of the Draft Constitution. The Commissioner also said that the election trainings and demonstrations, particularly the hoisting of banners and party flags, being conducted by the Commission were acceptable so long it did not infringe and violate the laws, tradition and custom of the country, and the rights of other individuals.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs informed the Assembly that since Bhutan was a hereditary monarchy, both the Command of the Druk Gyalpo as well the laws enacted by the National Assembly formed part of the laws of the country. The Druk Gyalpo has the sole authority to repeal or amend the laws enacted by the National Assembly. The Parliament in 2008 would be more credible because it

would consist of the National Assembly, the National Council and the Druk Gyalpo, and there would be more check and balance.

The Minister refuted the claims that all Bhutanese people could not take part during the introduction of parliamentary democracy and that only the educated population of 2 % were favoured. The Minister informed the House that for every 50 people, there was one individual with a university degree. There was no reason for the people to get worried because these university graduates were also Bhutanese citizens. Moreover, there was no requirement of university degree as minimum qualification for the *Gups* and members of the Local Governments. If we did not have strong and reliable election laws, even the criminals would become members of the Parliament, as is the case in our neighbouring countries. In the event such circumstances exist, even after 50 to 60 years of establishment of parliamentary democracy, the development of the country would be jeopardized.

His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo said that His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck initiated the whole process of democratization for the well-being of the future generations. Today the world looked at Bhutan as an example of sound policies, good leadership, peace and prosperity and His Majesty's visionary people centred philosophy of development have found admirers throughout the world. His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo commanded that our duty was to build an even brighter future for our nation and uphold the international respect His Majesty the Fourth King has earned for Bhutan. His Majesty commanded that if the members had further submissions to make, He would hold a separate meeting with the members to discuss the issue.

In obedience to the Command of His Majesty that a separate meeting would be held with the members, the National Assembly resolved to close the debate on the issue.

The deliberation on the endorsement and briefing of the Election Act of the Kingdom of Bhutan concluded on 28th December 2006.

3. Revision of Porterage rate

The people of Gasa, Thimphu and Zhemgang Dzongkhags submitted that the Government had always looked after the welfare of the people whose means of livelihood are solely depended on income earned from porter services. However, the present portorage rate based on the daily national minimum wage rate was inappropriate and inequitable for the people because porters got paid only for one way of the journey. For example, people were paid porter rates for five days and no consideration was made for the other five days taken to return. Moreover, people faced difficulty in finding porters for Government officials as people complained about the rates. Therefore, the people requested that the Government should increase the portorage payment rate in order to solve the problems of the people.

While deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs informed the House that the Government had increased the rates for pack and riding horses from Nu. 100 and Nu. 150 to Nu. 200 and Nu. 300 respectively from January 1, 2001. Although only six years had passed after the last revision, the request of the people was justified since with the development of the country, it was imperative for an appropriate upward revision of general entitlement scales. Although the issue had been discussed in the Council of Ministers and had decided to arrange for an appropriate upward revision, an appropriate rate could not be fixed. The Minister assured the Assembly that the rates for pack and riding horses, to be effective from January 2007, would be fixed as early as possible.

As submitted by the people of the three Dzongkhags for an upward revision of porter rates, and as per the decision of the Government to arrange for an appropriate upward revision, the National Assembly resolved that the Council of Ministers should discuss and finalize the portorage payment rates to be effective from January 2007.

The deliberation on revision of portorage payment rate concluded on 29th December 2006.

4. Gambling

The people of Samtse Dzongkhag submitted that although the entire Bhutanese people had benefited from having banned gambling activities by the Government, the gambling activities had been continuing in some places because the ban was not strictly enforced. The people enquired on the appropriate measures that the Government has adopted in order to uniformly ban gambling activities throughout the country. Likewise, people also raised concern on the newly introduced computer gambling (playwin) in towns and cities, expressing that it adversely affected the low income group of the country. Therefore, the people requested for a clarification on lottery ticket system and on computer gambling (playwin).

Likewise, the BCCI representative informed the House that at present, only one person had been issued license for the online lottery playwin in the country. The license owner had set up a total of 54 online lottery branches in the three major towns of Thimphu, Paro and Phuentsholing. The banning of online lottery was not possible due to the Bhutan-India bilateral trade agreement. But since there are many people who are interested and wanted licenses for online lottery, (playwin), it was submitted that the Government introduce its own online lottery system and issue the licenses through proper tendering process. Besides earning revenue for the Government, the introduction of the system would be very convenient for the license holders.

While deliberating on the issue, the Minister of Trade and Industry informed the Assembly that gambling activities were banned in the country owing to various social problems associated with gambling. Paper lotteries sold in Indian markets at one time was a major source of revenue for the Royal Government. In order to secure the future of Bhutan lottery in India, it was agreed between the two governments to include sale of lottery in our bilateral trade agreement whereby Bhutan could sell its lotteries in India and vice-versa. Since online gambling (playwin) was considered a type of lottery, the Government had no choice but to issue license for online lottery (playwin) as per our bilateral trade agreement. However, the Government, considering the social problems associated with online lottery, had stopped issuing new licences. While it cannot be totally banned, the Government has plans to limit such activities by increasing the annual tax on online gambling.

Continuing the deliberation on the issue in the next sitting on 3.01.2007, the Royal Advisory Councillors and members expressed concerns that gambling activities were increasing the use of social evils like drugs and tobacco. It was also pointed out that gambling activities adversely affected social and domestic relationships. In lieu of punishment, the accused should be made to pay fine as penalties. The members pointed out that under Article 9, Section 7 of the DYT *Chathrim*, the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu has the authority to adopt and enforce regulations for prevention of gambling. Therefore, the members submitted that there was a need for a resolution, either repealing the DYT *Chathrim*, or reaffirming the powers of the DYT as granted by the DYT *Chathrim*.

Some members pointed out that the provisions on prohibition of gambling activities were clearly stated in the DYT *Chathrim* as well as in the Bhutan Penal Code. However, in the event gambling activities were totally prohibited, it would be contradictory to the *Kasho* issued by His Majesty the King and the existing Government policies. Therefore, prohibition should be implemented only after having carried out a thorough assessment of the implications. Some members submitted that gambling activities should be totally banned and should not be allowed in towns during anytime of the day or night. In the event individuals were caught engaging in fights as a result of gambling disputes, penal actions should be strictly imposed to both to the individuals engaging in gambling and the owner of the house in which gambling is organised. Consequently, it would discourage gambling activities in the country.

The Prime Minister said that gambling activities threaten to disrupt social and domestic harmony. Therefore, in order to mitigate the problem, it was imperative that the National Assembly substantively deliberate the issue and conclude on an appropriate resolution. Likewise, due to increased gambling activities during annual *Tshechus*, people have become more interested into organizing gambling activities rather than taking interests in promoting our tradition and culture. Some people have run into great financial loss after having engaged in continuous gambling. The

Prime Minister also informed the House that people even rent their apartments for carrying out gambling activities. Therefore, such activities should be strictly prohibited from the very beginning.

The National Assembly noted that His Majesty the Third King had issued a *Kasho* prohibiting gambling activities in the country. The *Kidu* Lyonpo Tamzhing Jagar as well as the Council of Ministers in 1999 had issued several circulars and notifications banning gambling activities. However, gambling had been continuing because concerned authorities had not enforced the circulars and notifications strictly. The National Assembly resolved that henceforth, gambling activities would not be permitted in towns at any time and penalties would be imposed on house owners who rented their apartments for such activities. In the event the Royal Bhutan Police detect any gambling activities being carried out in contravention of the National Assembly resolutions and the notifications and circulars of the Government, the case should be forwarded to the court. Since online gambling playwin could not be prohibited due to the existing bilateral trade agreement with India, the National Assembly resolved that the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance should formulate appropriate tendering procedures as well as adopt measures to increase the tax on such activities.

The deliberation on gambling concluded on 29th December, 2006

5. To Give due Honour to His Majesty's Kasho

The people of Dzomi Geog of Punakha Dzongkhag submitted that it was the responsibility of every Bhutanese to honour the Royal *Kasho*. In the past the Royal *Kashos* were duly treasured by our parents. The *Kashos* were adorned with *Dhar* and placed in the *Chhoesham*. Today, instead of honouring and revering the Royal *Kasho*, some Government officials pen down remarks on the Royal *Kasho*. The people also submitted that the ministries and the departments refuse to give cognizance to a Royal *Kasho* if it did not contain written comments of the

Dzongkhag officials. The people submitted that such practices were wrong and sacrilegious. Therefore, the people sought clarification on the issue and requested that the Assembly should decide whether such practices were permissible and acceptable.

While deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs stated that it was the sacred responsibility of every Bhutanese to honour and revere His Majesty the King's body, speech and mind. Expressing his apologies for such wrongs committed by the Government officials, the Minister added that the Assembly should pass a resolution prohibiting such practices.

Some of the representatives of the people said that there were instances in the past where the Royal *Kasho* was tampered and altered and added that such acts were likely to continue in the future. Although writing comments and remarks on the Royal *Kasho* should be prohibited, the authorized officials should be allowed to attest on the photocopied *Kasho* as true copy.

Dissenting from the views expressed by some members, some of the members submitted that instead of deliberating on the photocopies of the Royal *Kasho*, the concerned officials should continue to honour the original Royal *Kasho* and execute the Royal command contained therein. The members submitted that an enquiry should be conducted to find out if the Government had acted on the Royal *Kasho* issued thus far, and submit the report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly for elaborate discussion.

The National Assembly resolved that all the sacrilegious and wrongful acts of tampering and altering of the Royal *Kasho* in future shall be forwarded to the court of law for punishment in accordance with the laws of the country. Only the original Royal *Kasho* should be given cognizance and writing of comments and remarks on the original Royal *Kasho* should *per se* be prohibited at all times. The Assembly also directed the Council of Ministers to conduct an enquiry as to whether the

ministries, departments and Dzongkhags had executed the command contained in the Royal *Kasho* issued thus far.

The deliberation on the issue to give due honour to His Majesty's Kasho concluded on 29th December, 2006.

6. Training, Study Tours and Geog Visits

The people of the Paro Dzongkhag submitted that in keeping with His Majesty's policy of decentralization, the Geog leaders in the country had been bestowed with greater roles and responsibilities. Although the Government had been providing training to enhance their skills and knowledge, the adoption of parliamentary democracy in 2008 would call for renewed emphasis on their capacity development and would require the Geog leaders to be aware of the new political system. Therefore, the people requested the Government to consider sending the community leaders on study tours to other countries. In addition, the people also requested the Cabinet Ministers to make goodwill visits to remote Dzongkhags and Geogs in the overall interest and welfare of the poor people. The members said that the past goodwill visits by the Cabinet Ministers had been able to eliminate the problems faced by the people. In support of the submissions made by the people, the Paro Dzongda said that it was imperative to send the community leaders on study tours even if it entailed huge financial burden to the Government.

Deliberating on the issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that in addition to a capable and competent Parliament, efficient and capable local government leaders were very essential for the success of the decentralization policy and democracy initiated by His Majesty. His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo had emphasised this on many occasions. Accordingly, the Government had sent around one hundred community leaders on study tours to other countries. The various trainings provided to them within the country were found to be extremely useful in understanding their new and increasing roles. The Minister informed the House that the Government intended to undertake accelerated and intensified capacity building

measures for the community leaders in 2007 before the institution of the parliamentary democracy in 2008.

The National Assembly resolved that in continuation of the capacity building measures undertaken by the Government, the Government should take initiatives to provide trainings and to send as many community leaders as possible on study tours in 2007.

The deliberation on trainings, study tours and Geog visits concluded on 29th December, 2006.

7. Renovation Budget Grants Required for Privately Owned Lhakhags

The people of Khar and Dungme Geogs of Pemagatsel Dzongkhag submitted that currently the Government did not provide budget for the renovation of the privately owned Lhakhags. The people requested the Government to provide budgetary assistance for the renovation of private Lhakhags similar to the budget grants provided for government Lhakhags.

Deliberating on the issue, the Zhung Kalyon, Royal Advisory Councillor, Deputy Speaker, Dzongda and Chimis said that similar to the system of providing budgetary grants for the renovation of the government and public Lhakhags, privately owned Lhakhags should also be granted renovation budgets. Members added that sacred religious relics inside the entire government and private Lhakhags were alike and therefore, privately owned Lhakhags should also be provided with equal financial assistance for the renovations. Members requested to be briefed on the mobilization of funds under and by the Heritage Trust Fund.

In order to reduce the present practice of raising funds for renovation of Lhakhags and Goendeys by means of lotteries and donations, either the Government or the Choethuen Tshogpa in the respective Dzongkhags should provide budgetary assistance. Members expressed that in the event funds were provided, mobilization

of funds through lotteries and donations would not be required. Some of the members informed the House that the Choeten Tshogpa in some Dzongkhags had been providing budgetary assistance annually for the restoration of Lhakhangs, repair and whitewashing of Chortens.

Members submitted that it was imperative to study the future benefits and implications on the exhibition of our country's sacred religious relics in other countries. Displaying of these sacred religious relics may increase the risk of being stolen by dissipated people because "where *Dharma* flourish, the Devils also thrive". Although Buddhism originated and flourished in India and the statue of Buddha was in the holy place of Dorjiden, today the statue was under the custody of another country. Members also expressed concern on the security and defilements that may be caused to our sacred relics while being taken abroad for exhibitions.

Members submitted that the display and exhibition of the sacred relics may be held within the country during the Coronation of the Fifth King. It would not only generate revenue for the country but would also give opportunities to the Bhutanese people to behold the country's sacred relics. Members suggested that the exhibition outside the country may be postponed since taking abroad of the sacred relics before 2008 was felt inauspicious during the time the country was celebrating the Coronation of the Fifth King. Members requested the Zhung Dratshang to brief the Assembly on the premonitions and presages of taking our sacred relics out of the country. Members also said that it was very important to get prior approval of either the National Assembly or the Cabinet before the country's sacred artefacts and cultural properties are taken out of the country.

The Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that in accordance with the policy of decentralization, the responsibility to identify, prioritize and take decisions on the renovation of the Government, public or privately owned Lhakhangs were delegated to respective Geogs. The budget grants for the renovation of minimum 3

Lhakhangs and a maximum of 5 Lhakhangs were being provided annually to the Geogs and Dzongkhags. He informed that substantial budgets have been allocated separately for renovations of Lhakhangs to be carried out by the Ministry and those to be carried out by the Dzongkhags. The Minister added that owing to busy engagements, the Ministry had not been able to mobilize funds under the Heritage Trust Fund.

His Majesty the King had repeatedly commanded that it was imperative to devote more efforts to the restoration and maintenance of old temples and monuments rather than building new ones. Accordingly, steel safe boxes were distributed in order to protect and conserve these sacred relics and cultural properties. Caretakers were provided proper trainings and likewise, necessary trainings were also imparted to nuns on methods to protect and conserve the sacred relics.

Corresponding to the coronation of the Fifth King in 2008, the sacred relics will be flown to Honolulu, America for exhibition. This exhibition was expected to immensely benefit the country. In addition few artefacts had been given on hire to four countries for the purpose of exhibition. The lease fees earned would greatly benefit in funding the renovation of public, private or state owned Lhakhangs within the country.

The exhibitions in those countries were programmed to be held corresponding to the coronation of the Fifth King in 2008 with the intent to further the reputation and international respect and to bring immense appreciation for the country. Proper agreement had been signed between the two countries and the issues of security measures and transportation safety had also been ensured under the agreement. The Minister assured the members that the blessed relics would be handled with utmost care and given due sanctimonious importance and respect during the entire period of the exhibition.

The National Assembly resolved as follows:

1. That the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs should continue to provide budget grants for the renovation of the entire private, public and state owned Lhakhangs, as per the request of the people.
2. That the renovation of the entire private, public and state owned Lhakhangs should be carried out under the supervision of the Dzongdags on priority basis. In addition to the budget granted by the Government, the Choeten Tshogpas in the respective Dzongkhags should provide the additional budget for renovation of the Lhakhangs.
3. That the Government should not grant permission to mobilise funds by means of lotteries and donations.
4. That before any of the sacred relics are taken abroad for exhibition, His Majesty the King who is the upholder and supreme head of the *Chhoe-sid-nyi*, should be informed. The Dratshang and the concerned members should formulate and finalise proper procedures and the security and safety of these cultural properties must be ensured.

The deliberation on the issue of renovation budget grants required for privately owned Lhakhangs concluded on 29th December, 2006.

8. Need for Audit Representatives in the Dzongkhags.

The people of the Mongar Dzongkhag submitted that the Royal Audit Authority finds many short comings in the planned developmental activities carried out by the Dzongkhags and the Geogs. In order to limit such problems in the future, the people requested for the placement of Internal Auditor in the Dzongkhags.

While discussing the issue, the Sarpang Dzongdag and the Chimis submitted that although it was the policy of the Government to maintain a small, compact and efficient civil service, there was a need for the Government to review its policy with

respect to audit personnel in order to prevent wastage of considerable Government resources. In accordance with the decentralization policy initiated by His Majesty the King, implementation of developmental activities had been delegated to the respective Dzongkhag and Geog Administration. However, the Geog Administration had been facing difficulties while implementing the community based developmental activities. Therefore, in order to prevent such difficulties and to mitigate the problems of financial irregularity in the Dzongkhags and the Geogs, it was requested that audit representatives in each of the twenty Dzongkhags should be appointed.

Similarly, due to shortage of accountants in the Geogs, the accounts and other financial matters of five to six Geogs were being maintained and looked after collectively by a single accountant. Therefore, the members requested the Government to consider the appointment of an accountant and an administrative assistant in each Geog. Although audits were being conducted annually in the Dzongkhags, audits in the Geogs were being conducted once in two to three years. There had been cases where audit was conducted subsequent to the completion of the tenure of a Gup and accordingly, the new Gup had been held responsible and accountable for the financial irregularities. Likewise, due to negligence and displacement of documents, Geogs had been facing immense difficulties of financial irregularities and related matters. In order to address the difficulties, members requested the Royal Audit Authority to consider the feasibility of conducting annual audits in the Geogs.

Since community leaders in the Dzongkhags and Geogs were not trained to maintain books of accounts, they were not able to settle and keep proper accounts, because of which there have been cases where community leaders have been penalized. Due to the fear of audit investigations, the community leaders at the present were apprehensive of fully utilizing the allocated budgets for development activities. Therefore, the appointment of internal auditors to impart necessary

guidance to the community leaders would prevent the community leaders from audit resulted penalties.

The Finance Minister, in support of the submissions made by the people said that the requests of the people were in keeping with the policy of the Government and the existing practices around the world. The Minister informed the House that such financial lapses were also prevalent in the entire departments, and that the appointment of internal auditors would indeed mitigate the problems. Owing to the shortage of skilled auditors, the Government had not been able to provide internal auditors even to the ministries in the central Government, leave alone establishing audit branch offices in the ministries. It was necessary to carry out proper studies before appointing auditors in the entire 205 Geogs. The cases of financial lapses and impropriety would be greatly reduced if the financial rules and manuals distributed by the Government were strictly followed. The Finance Minister requested the Assembly to direct the Government to arrive at a decision after discussing the issue with the Royal Civil Service Commission.

Likewise, the Prime Minister said that the Government would dispatch audit representatives in the entire Dzongkhags at the earliest possible. Regarding the appointment of audit representatives in the Geogs, it was requested that the Assembly should leave the decision to the Ministry of Finance and the Royal Civil Service Commission.

The National Assembly resolved that auditors should be dispatched to the entire Dzongkags as soon as possible. The National Assembly directed the Ministry of Finance and the Royal Civil Service Commission to thoroughly discuss on the feasibility of dispatching auditors in the entire Geogs. Although it was not feasible to conduct annual audits, the National Assembly resolved that audits must be conducted once in every two years in the entire Geogs.

The deliberation on the issue of need for audit representatives in the Dzongkhags concluded on 29th December, 2006

9. Increase in Enrollment of and Subsistence Allowance for Monks

The people of Samtse Dzongkhag submitted that our country being a place where Buddhism flourishes and considering the welfare of the public, the Government had helped to establish Dratshangs and appointed lams in most of the Geogs. However, people still faced difficulties while conducting rituals and funeral rites due to insufficient monks assisting the Lams. In order to mitigate the problem, the people submitted that around twenty five monks with ration and other allowances should be enrolled in each Dratshang.

While deliberating on the issue, the representatives of the Dratshang and the people submitted that since the presence of a single Lam in the Dratshangs was insufficient to attend to various needs of the communities, it was imperative to increase the number of monks attending under these respective Lams along with ration and other allowances. In order to promote peace and in order for *Dharma* to flourish in the country, around ten monks equipped with accessories to perform religious rituals and ceremonies, should be provided to assist each Lams in the villages. Members pointed out that this would immensely benefit in solving the various needs of the rural communities.

The Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs informed the Assembly that all state supported Dratshangs were established by order of His Majesty the King and likewise, the number of monks was determined on the basis of the Royal Command. Therefore, in accordance with the prevailing practice, the authority to make decisions pertaining to religious matters should be left with His Majesty the King. Since the National Assembly was a place where political issues were discussed, the Minister opined that complications in future would be prevented if religious issues were not discussed in the Assembly.

As submitted by the Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, the National Assembly noted that the matter pertaining to the increase in the enrollment and subsistence allowance for monks would be resolved under the directives of His Majesty the

King and the Je Khenpo. Since the National Assembly was not in a position to decide on the matter, the National Assembly directed the respective Dzongkhags to make their submissions to the Dratshang Lhentshog for suitable arrangement.

The deliberation on the need to increase the enrollment of and subsistence allowance for monks concluded on 29th December, 2006.

10. Revision of Personal Income Tax Rate

The people of Mongar, Trashiyangtse and Trongsa Dzongkhags and the people of Kazhi and Nisho Geogs under Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag submitted that since the main objectives of the Tenth Five Year Plan were poverty alleviation and balanced and equitable economic growth, it was necessary to implement various developmental activities in the rural areas. Therefore, it was submitted that the present PIT rate should be revised to an appropriate rate in order to help meet the objectives of both the Government and the people. In order to achieve His Majesty's noble vision of Gross National Happiness, to eradicate poverty and to achieve balanced and equitable economic growth, it was imperative to revise the PIT rate after carrying out proper studies on its feasibility and appropriateness.

Since PIT was one of the main sources of Government revenue, the revised PIT should be reconsidered as per the tax slabs and structure approved during the launching of PIT in the country. The members submitted that people were not aware of the importance of the PIT and its contribution to the National Budget when it was intensively deliberated during the 81st and 82nd Sessions of the National Assembly. Since people have realized the importance of contributing towards PIT in poverty eradication objectives, the members submitted that the existing PIT rates should be revised.

While deliberating on the issue, the Royal Advisory Councillors and members said that besides financing the increasing developmental activities of the Tenth Five Year Plan, substantial resources would be required during the establishment of the

new government. Bhutanese people should make contributions towards the PIT in order to reduce the gap between the poor and the rich and therefore, it was imperative to revise the existing PIT rate. Some of the members submitted that the tax exemption slab should be increased from the existing Nu. 100,000 (one hundred thousand) to Nu. 300,000 (three hundred thousand) and the tax rate for the highest tax slab should be increased to 35% from the previous proposed tax rate of 25%. Members also submitted that the existing PIT ceilings should be retained without amendment and that it should be later tabled in the new Parliament for appropriate revision.

Responding on the issue, the Finance Minister said that in order to fulfil and realize the sound policies initiated by His Majesty the King, it was imperative to restore the previous PIT rates which the Ministry of Finance had proposed during the launching of PIT in the country in the 81st Session. The Minister said that the Finance Ministry had proposed the PIT system and the rates after a thorough analysis over a lengthy period of time. The Minister added that the revenue generated from an enhanced rate would greatly help to reduce the burgeoning deficits and maintain the government finance in a sound state. Therefore, it was requested that the previous tax rates of 10-15-20-25% proposed by the Ministry of Finance be restored.

The National Assembly noted that the revenue generated from the Personal Income Tax would greatly help to meet the ever increasing developmental needs of the nation. Besides the government and the private sector, the entire Bhutanese population was equally responsible to contribute their share towards the Personal Income Tax of the country. Since an entire revision of the tax structure would require a very thorough analysis over a lengthy period of time, the National Assembly resolved that the previous Personal Income Tax rates of 10-15-20-25% proposed by the Ministry of Finance would be implemented with effect from the 2007 income tax year.

The deliberation on revision of Personal Income Tax rate concluded on 29th December, 2006.

11. Establishment of Additional Tertiary Institutes

The people of Mongar and Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that since there was only one degree college in the country, many students were deprived of the opportunity to study further. The children from the poor families who cannot afford to study abroad are disheartened and a number of them resort to drugs and alcohol. Therefore, if a new degree college, either government owned or private was established, it would benefit the people enormously. Since there were only two tertiary institutes in the country, almost 70% of the students have to pursue further studies abroad. This results in negative impact in terms of preservation of our tradition and *Driglam Namzha* and there was also substantial out flow of financial resources. If a degree college was established in the country, it would be able to provide opportunities to those who could not afford to study abroad to pursue further education and generate more employment opportunities for the youths.

While deliberating on the issue, some of the members submitted that since there were just two tertiary institutes in the country, only those who excelled qualified for college and a large number of students did not get the opportunity to go to college. The children from the poor families who did not have the means to study abroad were disheartened and resorted to drugs and alcohol. Therefore, the Government should establish a college or allow the private sector to establish a college in the country.

Responding on the issue, the Minister for Education said that in 2006 there were a total of 6,256 Bhutanese students pursuing college education of which only 2,436 students were pursuing their studies outside the country. In accordance with the resolutions of the past sessions of the National Assembly, the Ministry of Education renamed and expanded the existing colleges and vocational institutes in the country

in order to solve the problems faced by the people. After the completion of the Tala Hydro Power Project by 2007-2008, the complex at Gedu would be handed over to the Royal University of Bhutan. Accordingly by March or April of 2008, a Degree College similar to Sherubtse College shall be established in Gedu which shall be named after His Majesty the Fourth King as Jigme Singye Wangchuck College. The new college would concentrate more on commercial studies.

The Minister also informed the House that recently a Bhutanese private firm had come up with a proposal to set up a college in Nagbephu, a place away from the Thimphu town. The application was submitted to the Council of Ministers through the Royal University of Bhutan and the Council of Ministers issued the approval and has directed the firm to submit a detailed project report. By the end of the Tenth Plan and before 2013, there would be at least 11-12 degree colleges in the country which would solve the problems faced by the people.

The National Assembly noted that since the issue on the establishment of degree college had been elaborately deliberated and resolved in the past sessions, the repeated submission of the same agenda by the members was in contradiction of the past resolutions. The National Assembly resolved that establishment of degree colleges should be in accordance with the education plans and policies.

The deliberation on the establishment of additional tertiary institutes concluded on 29th December, 2006.

12. Discipline, Dress Code and Language

The people of Dzomi and Talo Geogs under Punakha Dzongkhag submitted that although efforts had been made to promote and preserve our unique culture and tradition in order to ensure and safeguard the present and future sovereignty of the country, with changing times and with the development of the country, our rich culture and tradition had been on the decline and they are not accorded due importance. Therefore, the Government should formulate measures and direct more

efforts towards strengthening our unique *Driglam Namzha*, dress code and language. It was also submitted that since it was the collective responsibility of the entire Bhutanese people to promote and preserve the *Driglam Namzha*, every individual should comprehend its importance and direct their efforts to promote and preserve our culture and tradition.

Supporting the submission, the Royal Advisory Councillor and the representatives of the people said that in order to promote *Driglam Namzha* in the Southern Dzongkhags, it was imperative to hold annual *Tshechus* and special traditional programmes in the Geogs rather than in the Dzongkhags. In the event effective measures were not adopted to ensure the preservation of our excellent culture and tradition, people may neglect and with the adoption of parliamentary democracy in 2008, the culture and tradition could be threatened. Therefore, it was important to adopt stringent measures to preserve and protect the culture and tradition.

Although it was decided in the annual local government Chairmen Conference that official correspondences written in English should be returned to the agency from where the letter was sent, the decision had not been implemented and official correspondences were continued to be written in English. When the Anti-Corruption Commission Day was observed on 9th of December, the entire presentation on corruption and related matters were carried out in English. While it was imperative for the general public to fully understand about corruption, majority of the Bhutanese people were unable to comprehend what was being presented. These instances showed non compliance and defiance of not only His Majesty's *Kasho*, but also of the National Assembly resolutions. The members also submitted that although there were strong laws based on equality and rule of law, the powerful and the influential have been favoured during the actual implementation of the laws. This unequal implementation of the laws may create problems and difficulties among communities and in the society.

The members reminded the House that promotion and preservation of the culture and tradition was one of the pillars of the Gross National Happiness. In addition, the *Kasho* issued by His Majesty the Fourth King on the 4th day of the 12th month of the Earth Dragon Year and on the 10th day of the 9th month of Female Water Bird Year of the Bhutanese Calendar, commanded that efforts should be directed towards the promotion and preservation of the Dzongkha Language which was our unique national identity. Therefore, it was submitted that the Government should formulate effective measures to further strengthen our culture and tradition.

Deliberating on this issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that as per the command of His Majesty's *Kasho* issued on 19th February, 1989 and the Executive Order of the Prime Minister dated 16th January, 2000, the Ministry for Home and Cultural Affairs had been regularly administering *Driglam Namzha*, dress code and the language issues through dispatch of continuous circulars and notifications. Since *Driglam Namzha* could not be promoted and preserved only through enforcement of stringent laws, it was imperative to in-calculate positive intentions and conduct within individuals and thereby voluntarily practice *Driglam Namzha* by means of conscious pursuit. In view of the fact that the responsibility of the country's future governance depended with the present youth, teachers in schools across the country should undertake more efforts in disseminating education on the merits and demerits of promoting and preserving our unique *Driglam Namzha*. He added that such efforts would be immensely beneficial for the present and future wellbeing of our country. While tremendous achievement had been made in the use of Dzongkha Language as compared in the past, it was imperative to accord due respect and compliance to His Majesty's *Kasho* and the National Assembly resolutions.

The Prime Minister said that the concerns about the promotion and preservation of the culture and tradition expressed by the people were indeed apparent and opportune because the *Kasho* issued by His Majesty had commanded on the preservation of culture and tradition. At a time when rapid changes were taking place in the world, it was inappropriate to preserve, promote and enforce culture

and tradition through laws and severity of punishment. Instead other effective measures had to be adopted to uphold, strengthen and promote our tradition and culture. No laws would be required if people practiced *Driglam Namzha* with all the body, speech and soul.

Continuing the deliberation, the Royal Advisory Councillor, the Zhemgang Dzongdag and the representatives of the people suggested that in accordance with the *Kasho* of His Majesty the King and the earlier resolutions, the Assembly should adopt a resolution requiring all Bhutanese to wear *Gho* and *Kira* while visiting Dzongs, Monastries and Government offices. The members also opined that since the *Kasho* did not contain anything about wearing of *Gho* and *Kira* in towns, it would be inappropriate to pass a resolution to that effect. Since 98% of the Bhutanese were not aware of *Driglam Namzha*, it was important to impart training to the government officials and local leaders. It was also important to impart training on *Driglam Namzha* to the Police cadets and the students at the teacher training institutes.

The National Assembly reminisced that the traditional etiquette and culture being the unique national symbol and identity and with a view to ensure and safeguard the sovereignty of the country, His Majesty the King had issued the Royal *Kasho*. The National Assembly, noting that it was the collective responsibility of both the Government and the people to promote and preserve the country's unique culture and tradition resolved as follows:

1. The personnel working in the departments and autonomous agencies under the ministries should be imparted trainings and briefings on *Driglam Namzha* under the supervision of the respective ministers.
2. For the departments and agencies under the Dzongkhags, the concerned Dzongdags and the Drangpons should train and brief the civil servants working under them on *Driglam Namzha*.

3. The Chairmen of the Dzongkhag Tshogdu and Geog Tshogchung and the community leaders should impart briefings and trainings on *Driglam Namzha* to the people in their respective constituencies.

4. Since the responsibility of ensuring the future independence and sovereignty of the country lied in the hands of the youths today, it was the responsibility of the Education Ministry to maintain and safeguard the traditional etiquette and culture. Therefore, the teachers should brief the students on *Driglam Namzha* and related issues and also make them habituated to practising the traditional etiquette and culture.

5. The Ministry for Home and Cultural Affairs should create awareness on *Driglam Namzha*, Dress Code and Language, as commanded in the Royal *Kasho* and as per the earlier resolutions of the Assembly, through the newspapers and television.

6. It was the duty of the police to check whether one was conforming to the dress code and *Driglam Namzha*, and the police should arrest and take appropriate action if one did not conform to the dress code and *Driglam Namzha*.

7. The actual practice of *Driglam Namzha*, Dress Code and Language should be in accordance and in complete compliance to the *Royal Kasho* and the Resolutions of the 81st and 85th Sessions of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on discipline, dress code and language concluded on 1st January, 2007.

13. Conferring of *Dhars*

The people of Shenga Bjime Geog and the representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted that it was imperative to streamline the tradition of conferring *dhars* before the introduction of parliamentary democracy. If the widespread tradition of conferring *dhars* was not made clear, there would be

conflicts between the people and there was also the risk of corruption. In order to avoid such undesirable problems, it was imperative to streamline and spell out a clear procedure for such celebrations.

Deliberating on the issue, some of the members said that although the tradition of conferring *dhars* existed in the past, with development and changing times, the tradition today had not only become grand and an expensive affair, but was also becoming an inconvenience for the poor people. In addition, there was the risk of people indulging in corrupt practices.

Some of the members suggested that since it was a difficult task to frame norms and to fix ceilings for conferring *dhars*, the Government should hold discussions and submit a report to the 87th Session of the National Assembly. The members also suggested the offering of *khadhar* only and not cash or presents.

Responding on the issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that the tradition of conferring *dhars* had more negative impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of the country. Therefore, any promotions or appointment should be marked by a simple *zhungdel phuensum tshogpai tendrel* whose cost should be borne by the respective organization. The Minister also suggested the offering of *Khadhar* only and not cash or presents.

The National Assembly resolved that with the exception of His Majesty the King and His Holiness the Je-Khenpo, the promotions and appointments of other lams in the Dratshang, the senior government officials, and the local leaders should be marked by a simple *zhungdel phuensum tshogpai tendrel* in their offices, and only a *Khadhar* should be offered. No grand celebrations should be organized at home and no gifts, presents or *Zhongs* should be offered or given. If celebrations were organised in contravention of the Resolution, the Royal Advisory Council, the Anti-Corruption Commission, the Police, the Dzongdags or the Geog *Tshogpas* should investigate and report the matter to the Anti-Corruption Commission for appropriate action.

The deliberation on the issue of conferring of Dhars concluded on 1st January, 2007.

14. Reduce Compensation after the Verification of Crimes.

The people of Trashiyangtse and Samtse Dzongkhags submitted that Section 39 and Sections 138 to 145 of the Bhutan Penal Code clearly spelt out the payment of compensation to the victim for crimes such as intentional murders and negligent homicide. However, the payment of compensation for accidental death in accordance with Section 39 was inequitable and unjustified. Therefore, the people requested for reduction of compensation for accidental and unintentional crimes.

The National Assembly deferred the discussion on the issue and directed the Legislative Committee to discuss the issue with the Judiciary and submit the report in the 87th Session of National Assembly for elaborate deliberation.

The deliberation on the issue of reduction of compensation concluded on 1st January, 2007.

15. Compensation for Persons Detained on Doubt and without any Conviction.

The people of Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag submitted that although criminals had to be punished, no compensation was being paid to poor people who are detained by the police on suspicion but released later when found innocent. Since it was inequitable for such people, it was submitted that compensation should be paid at daily national wage rate to the victim and the person who reported to the police should be punished. The representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry suggested that it would be appropriate if the Judiciary and the police discussed the issue and submitted a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly for comprehensive deliberation.

The National Assembly noted that although persons detained by the police on suspicion but released when found innocent were required to be paid compensation, it was also essential to comply with the provisions of the Bhutan Penal Code. Therefore, the National Assembly resolved that the Legislative Committee should hold discussions with the Judiciary and submit a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly where it shall be comprehensively discussed.

The deliberation on payment of compensation to persons detained on doubt concluded on 1st January, 2007.

16. Stopping of the Present System of Handcuffing the Accused.

The people of Chang and Kawang Throm under Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that the present practice of handcuffing the accused when being escorted to the courts from police custody was inhumane. Since the arrest warrant issued by the court did not mention that the accused should be handcuffed, it was imperative for the Assembly to know if such individuals had been charge-sheeted. It was also submitted that the Assembly should deliberate thoroughly on the issue and resolve to prevent such inhumane and humiliating practices.

Deliberating on this issue, the Paro Dzongdag and representatives of the people said that the inhumane practice of handcuffing was prevalent in other Dzongkhags too. With a view to eliminate such problems and harassment to the people, the issue had been thoroughly discussed both at the Geog and the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdu levels. The handcuffing should be in accordance with the laws governing the police and the severity of crimes committed. The persons committing severe felonies such as murder and vandalizing of *Choetens* and *Lhakhangs* should be handcuffed, but those who are disabled, women and children should never be handcuffed.

Since it was crucial to make thorough enquiries into the criminal liability, the gravity of crime committed, the causes of the crime and the punishment that the individual was liable for, and for proper implementation of the laws, the human resource in the police should be strengthened and proper guidance and trainings

should be imparted. Since the present practice of detaining all the prisoners, irrespective of gravity of crimes committed, in a single detention room or prison was inappropriate, the members submitted that the Government should consider constructing separate prison cells or detention rooms for prisoners convicted for different crimes.

Responding on the issue, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that Bhutan being a country where Gross National Happiness was a policy statement, handcuffing was indeed inhumane. However, handcuffing was not illegal but was a universal procedure that is followed by the law enforcement authorities in all countries including those that consider themselves champions and defenders of human rights. Handcuffing was the way to use minimum force on any accused or suspect when taken to a court to prevent them from escaping. The Minister suggested that this issue could be discussed thoroughly in the next session when the draft Police Act, which was being drafted, would be tabled for enactment.

The National Assembly reminded the House that although criminals who committed heinous crimes should be handcuffed and punished, handcuffing of persons who committed civil wrongs was not only violative of human rights but was also inhumane and degrading. Since the Home Minister submitted that the Police Act was being drafted, the National Assembly resolved that the Council of Ministers should consider this issue carefully and include safeguards and protective provisions in the draft Police Act. Since it was crucial to have separate prisons for criminals convicted of different crimes, the National Assembly resolved that the Council of Ministers should give budgetary support and make preparations to begin the construction of separate prisons.

The deliberation on stopping the present system of handcuffing the accused concluded on 1st January, 2007.

17. Matters Regarding *Zhapto Lemi* Contribution

The people of Samtse, Mongar and Pemagatshel Dzongkhags expressed their profound gratitude for resolving to discontinue the system of *Zhapto Lemi* during the 85th Session of the National Assembly. However, the people expressed difficulties in carrying out community based developmental activities such as renovation of Lhakhangs, irrigation channels and drinking water schemes. Therefore, the people requested the National Assembly to reinstate the system of *Zhapto Lemi* in order to mitigate these difficulties.

Likewise, till date all developmental activities such as construction of suspension bridges, mule tracks, community schools, rural water supply and renovation of Lhakhangs were financed by the Royal Government. However, the public have been facing difficulties since these developmental activities were carried out with labour contributions from the respective communities. As such the people submitted that there was the need to segregate the *Zhapto Lemi* system into two groups whereby large projects like construction of suspension bridges, mule tracks and community schools should be awarded on contract basis while small projects like renovation and maintenance of Lhakhangs and drinking water schemes should be carried out by the people themselves under *Zhapto Lemi* terms.

While deliberating on the issue, members submitted that people were facing difficulties towards their contributions in *Zhapto Lemi* due to the sparse population in the rural communities and therefore, the existing resolution of the 85th Session of the National Assembly should be retained. Otherwise, members submitted that transportation fees and wages at the National Wage Rate should be provided, considering the *Kidu* of certain remote and poor geogs. It was imperative to segregate the system of *Zhapto Lemi* system into two groups where developmental activities directly benefiting communities should be carried out through labour contributions from the people, while new and large projects should be awarded on contract basis by the government from the 10th FYP onwards.

Responding on the issue, the Prime Minister informed that in the near future, all developmental activities in the Geogs and Dzongkhags would be implemented by

the Local Governments and budget allocation itself would be based on the socio-economic state of the communities. Therefore, the Prime Minister suggested that the House should not immediately decide on the issue of *Zhapto Lemi* but that it should be left to the Government to carry out proper studies and submit a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The National Assembly resolved that since it was imperative to carry out through examination and analysis on the issue, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs should carry out a through analysis and clearly segregate the specific community activities to be carried out under the *Zhapto Lemi* system and of those to be awarded by the Government on contract basis and thereafter, submit its report during the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on matters regarding Zhapto Lemi concluded on 1st January, 2007.

18. Absentee Households to Pay Annual Contribution to Geog Administration

The people of Tsirang Dzongkhag submitted that many households in the Geogs had become absentee households as a result of the increased number of people being employed in Government Service and National Work Force. The issue of absentee households was a serious problem in the Geog Administration, particularly with respect to *Zhapto Lemi* contributions and remittance of rural taxes. In order to mitigate the problem, it was submitted that these absentee households be made to pay a certain fixed amount yearly to the Geog Administration to compensate for their absence.

While deliberating on the issue, the Royal Advisory Councillors and the representatives of the people submitted that much of the *Zhapto Lemi* contributions were made by poor people residing permanently in the Geogs but that people who owned land and house never made *Zhapto Lemi* contributions and it seriously

hampered the administration of the Geog. The Geog Administration also faced inconveniences as a result of people owning land and house in one Geog although their census was registered in other Geogs. In order to mitigate the problem, it was crucial to frame proper laws regarding the issues. Likewise, owing to the lack of basic facilities in the rural areas, many people in the Southern Dzongkhags have migrated and were employed in the National Work Force. Therefore, the Dzongdags and the community leaders should appraise the Government about these problems. Adoption of appropriate measures by the Government would not only curb rural - urban migration, but would also facilitate and fulfil the objectives of *Zhapto Lemi* contribution and eradication of poverty.

The Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs informed the Assembly that during the Annual Conference of the Dzongdags, it was decided that all beneficiaries of services in the villages shall be required to contribute labour or cash, irrespective of whether they were resident or absentee households owning land and properties. Given the problems associated with rural tax collections, it was agreed to be decided after having formulated proper rules and regulations. Accordingly, the Minister said that the report on the issue would be submitted together with the *Zhapto Lemi* report for deliberation during the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

As submitted by the Minister of Home and Cultural Affairs, the National Assembly resolved that since the issues needed proper examination and analysis, the concerned Ministry should carry out thorough analysis of the issues and submit its report during the 87th Session of the National Assembly for deliberation.

The deliberation on payment of annual contribution to Geog Administration by absentee households concluded on 1st January, 2007.

19. Measures to Curb the Problem of Wild Animals

The people of Tsenkhar Geog submitted that farmers whose sole livelihood depended on agriculture cultivated their fields once a year, working very hard throughout the year in order to reap a good harvest. Unfortunately, crops were destroyed by wild animals near harvest time despite every effort taken to guard the fields against encroachment by wild animals. Although the Forest and Nature Conservation Act permits farmers to shoot and kill wild animals encroaching standing crop fields within 200 meters of the boundary, it had not been of much help. Therefore, the people requested the Government to adopt suitable measures to prevent wild animals from destroying crops or grant commensurate compensation to the affected farmers.

Supporting the submission, members said that farmers who depended solely on agriculture for livelihood had been facing problems of wild animals destroying their crops which were cultivated only once a year. Farmers had been facing immense problems due to wild animals like tigers, leopards, bear and boars attacking their livestock. Members requested the Government to initiate measures to mitigate the problems of encroachment by wild animals.

The Minister of Agriculture informed that the problem of encroachment by wild animals was prevalent from long before. In order to address the problem of wild animals destroying crops, the Ministry of Agriculture had prepared a framework. Under the framework, a task force was formed in May 2001 to review the past initiatives on wild boar problems with the farmers and propose action plan. Accordingly, the Minister reported to the House of the various action plans proposed by the task force. The Ministry, after consultation with the various stakeholders had increased the radius to 200 meters from the previous radius of 50 meters. Further increase of radius from 200 meters barely after one year from the last revision, was indeed premature and would entail numerous inconveniences to the Department of Forests. The concerns raised on the ineffectiveness of 200 meters radius needed to be thoroughly studied and it was equally imperative to understand the justifications supporting the further increase in the radius. Although payments

amounting to Nu. 5.45 million as compensation for livestock killed by tigers had already been made by the Government, additional payment of compensation amounting Nu. 2 million could not be made to farmers due to financial constraints. Although it was important to compensate the farmers for the crops damaged and for every livestock killed, it was equally important to mutually understand the problems faced by the Government as well. As per the request of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs had included the problems of wildlife within the framework of the National Disaster Risk Management. The problems of wildlife damaging the crops were to be reported through the respective Dzongkhags.

Measures such as stone wall fencing and setting up of snares were identified to be effective. Since the Department of Forests was primarily responsible for the protection of wildlife, the Ministry would issue directives to the Department of Forests to facilitate adequate assistance in the rural areas towards wildlife protection and preventive measures in curbing crop damages by wild animals.

The Deputy Minister of National Environment Commission, Royal Advisory Councillor and Zhemgang Dzongdag said that unrestricted killings of wildlife for causing damage to crops would draw international criticisms and adversely affect relations between countries and donor agencies. The Dzongkhag Administration was responsible for the proper assessment of damages to crops incurred by wild animals. Therefore, it was requested that the Government acknowledge the damage assessment as reported jointly by the Geog Administration and the Dzongkhag Administration and thereby arrange to provide compensation.

The National Assembly expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Agriculture for formulating a framework and various other action plans with a view to mitigate the problems of the farmers. Likewise, the National Assembly also expressed appreciation to the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs for initiating compensation payment procedures for major damages to crops by wildlife. The National Assembly reminded that the Department of Forests should initiate more

efforts into implementing appropriate measures to mitigate human-wildlife problems in the rural areas. The National Assembly resolved that when assessment reports on damages to crops by wildlife are submitted by the Dzongkhags, the Government should adequately compensate the affected farmers as identified in the reports.

The deliberation on the need to adopt measures to curb the problem of wild animals concluded on 3rd January, 2007.

20. Need to Open New Trade Routes

The people of Nobugang Geog under Pemagatshel Dzongkhag and the people of Sarpang Dzongkhag submitted that the main source of income for the people of eastern region was through the sale of mandarin and potatoes to Assam. However, the lack of a trade route to Bangladesh forced the farmers to trade with the local businessmen in Assam where the prices fetched were not as attractive as those exported to other countries. Therefore, considering the welfare of the people, they requested the Government to open alternative trade to Bangladesh via Samdrupjongkhar. Moreover, only limited foreign businessmen participated in the export auction because of which the Bhutanese exporters did not have the leverage to increase the price of the commodities. In addition, payments to Bhutanese exporters were delayed on several occasions. The members also submitted that the tax which the small exporters paid to the syndicates and big businessmen for export and import of materials was also inequitable and causing problems for the small exporters. Since the opening of a trade route via Dubri in India had already been discussed, the members requested that the process be expedited and the new trade route be opened at the earliest.

Deliberating on the issue, the Ministers for Trade and Industry and Agriculture said that opening of new trade routes was limited by the fact that trade routes with other countries had to always pass through India. While Burimari was a major trading centre, the Indian Government had identified and approved the opening of a trade

route through Phulbari. The trade route via Burimari was convenient for the western Dzongkhags while trade route via the Indian state of Assam was the most convenient for the eastern Dzongkhags. Therefore, the Government was in the process of negotiating with the Government of India for a trade route through Assam. Although Bhutan had requested for inclusion of four additional trade routes via Dawki, Dubrii, Dalu and Gasuapara, the Indian Government had agreed only to Dawki in Meghalaya. Due to lack of infrastructure at Dalu and Gasuapara, the Government had not been able to get the approval immediately for establishing trade routes through Dalu and Gasuapara. As regards Dubri, negotiations were underway.

In addition, the Government with a view to establish as many routes as possible had reviewed the existing trade agreement with India and the revised agreement had also been signed by the two countries. Bhutan today was a member of both the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) and the BIMSTEC. Bhutan was also negotiating and processing for membership to World Trade Organization (WTO).

The Minister for Agriculture informed the House that the Agriculture Marketing Services of Ministry of Agriculture would form a farmer's group at Nanglam to export oranges directly to Bangladesh similar to the one in Pangbang. The Agriculture Ministry was continuing to explore export markets in Sri Lanka and Thailand for Bhutanese potatoes. A trial export of Bhutanese apples to Sri Lanka was also undertaken by the Ministry. For high value and low volume niche products like matsutake, cordyceps and red rice, export markets had been established in countries like USA and Taiwan.

The Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with the Finance Ministry would continue to explore all means to mitigate the problems faced by the farmers. Since the Bhutanese cash crops and medicinal plants had huge markets, the farmers should also work hard on growing more and better quality cash crops.

Since the expansion and establishment of trade routes was crucial for the welfare of the farmers, the National Assembly resolved that the Ministry of Trade and Industry should hold discussions with the Indian Government and endeavour to

establish the trade route via *Dupri* before 2007. As regards delay in payments to the small exporters and the problems faced by the small traders while importing and exporting goods in collaboration with the big businessmen and syndicates, the concerned Ministry should conduct proper investigations and adopt measures to solve the problems. In order to improve the agricultural infrastructure, the agriculture yields and to explore markets for the agricultural products, the Ministry of Trade and Industry in collaboration with the Finance Ministry and Agriculture Ministry should work towards expanding and establishing trade routes.

The deliberation on the need to open new trade routes concluded on 3rd January, 2007.

21. Increase in price of commodities.

The people of Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that the public was usually unaware of sudden increase in prices for commodities such as fuel and vehicle spare parts. Hence, the people submitted that it was important for the concerned Ministry to check such price increase and inform the public accordingly in advance in future.

The Deputy Speaker and the representatives of the people said that without any prior information to the public the prices of food items, clothes, fuel and vehicle spare parts were increased altogether from July 2006. Even the prices of the alcohol produced in the country were increased by the seller at their discretion every month. The sudden and erratic increase in the prices of the commodities had caused a lot of financial inconveniences to the people. The representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry asked the Government to brief the House on the issue and suggested that the Government and the Indian Companies should hold discussions to make the price fluctuations more stable and predictable. It was also requested that the Government should adopt measures to inform the public in advance on increase in price of commodities.

Drawing specific example, the members said that in Thimphu vegetable market, the price of a kilogram of ginger ranged from Nu. 70 to 80 although it cost only about

Nu. 7 to 20 at the source, or the place of cultivation. When the price of such a small commodity ranged and differed drastically, the price of other commodities remaining constant and stable was altogether out of question. The members reminded the House that as per the DYT Act, the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdue had the authority to enforce and adopt regulations with regard to the protection of consumers from unfair prices and counterfeit goods. The members requested the members of Thimphu DYT and Dzongdag to brief the Assembly on the discussions held and measures adopted on the issue by the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogdue. The representative of Thimphu Dzongkhag informed the House that a Committee had been established as per the discussions held in the Thimphu Dzongkhag Yargey Tshogdue. However, the Committee had not been effective in curbing the problem of unfair prices. Since Thimphu was a city with a huge population where all kinds of people assembled, it would be difficult for the Committee to address the aforementioned problem. In addition, the members said that the Government, considering the welfare of the rural people, had not fixed the price of commodities which came from the rural areas. However, the commodities which were imported had Maximum Retail Price (MRP) fixed by the manufacturing companies. Therefore, if the shopkeepers sold the commodities at Maximum Retail Price (MRP) as fixed by the companies, much of the problems would be solved.

In response, the Minister for Trade and Industry informed the House that in accordance with the Royal Command to charge nominal tax on the goods imported from other countries, some of the essential commodities imported were exempted from tax while some commodities were charged nominal tax. The Royal Command had been issued considering the welfare of the people. As regards the increase in fuel price and the concurrent increase in the price of commodities, the Minister said that the price fluctuations in Bhutan depended on the global price movements. Since Bhutan produced very limited commodities in the country, it was not convenient to hold discussions with the foreign companies about the price of the commodities. Therefore, other than waiving off tax or charging nominal tax on imported essential commodities to lower the price, there was not much that the Government could do.

The National Assembly noted that much of the problems would be solved if people purchased the commodities at the Maximum Retail Price (MRP) fixed by the Company and asked for receipts. Since the issue could not be decided immediately by the House, the National Assembly resolved that the respective Dzongkhag Yargey Tshogdues and the concerned Ministry should hold discussions and devise mechanisms to solve the problems.

The deliberation on increase in price of commodities concluded on 3rd January 2007.

22. Enhancement of the Scope of Life Insurance

The people of Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag expressed deepest gratitude to His Majesty the Fourth King for introducing the Rural Life Insurance Scheme in the interest of the poor people in 1982. When the Scheme was introduced, children aged eight years and above who paid a premium of Nu. 10.00 received Nu. 1500.00 as insurance benefit in the event of death. In 2000, the premium was increased to Nu. 30 and correspondingly, the deceased received Nu. 10,000.00 as insurance benefit. The Rural Life Insurance Scheme had immensely benefited the deceased as well as the relatives for which people were extremely grateful. Therefore, the people requested the Government to expand the life insurance coverage to include children of one year and above or if that was not feasible, children aged five years and above.

Deliberating on the issue, the Finance Minister said that considering the welfare of the rural population, His Majesty the Fourth King had not only introduced the Rural Life Insurance Scheme in 1982, but had also revised and increased the premium and the corresponding benefits in 2000. Although the Government collects a total premium of Nu.13 million annually, the Government has to pay Nu. 30 million as insurance benefits annually, as a consequence of which the Government was suffering financial loss of around Nu. 17 million annually. Though life insurance scheme in other countries was a business undertaking, His Majesty the Fourth King

introduced the Scheme in Bhutan for the welfare of the people. Therefore, the Minister said that the Government would conduct studies on expanding the insurance coverage and submit a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The National Assembly resolved that request of the people for revision and expansion of life insurance coverage should be considered by the Finance Ministry and submit a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on enhancement of scope of life insurance concluded on 3rd January 2007.

23. Establishment of Tourist Liaison Office in the Eastern Region

The people of Shongphu Geog under Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that tourists visited our country because of the rich culture and heritage and further submitted that people had understood the importance of contribution of tourism towards balanced regional growth and socio economic development. Since eastern Bhutan had the potential of developing a community based tourism, it was submitted that a tourism liaison office to facilitate the movement of tourist was essential in eastern Bhutan. The people also requested the Government to hold discussions with the Government of India regarding the use of Guwahati Airport as an entry point for tourists wishing to visit the country.

Deliberating on the issue, the Royal Advisory Councillor and the representatives of the people said that for balanced economic development of the country, not only tourism industry but other development activities should also be initiated in the eastern and southern Dzongkhags. It was also important for the Government to assess the security situation in the region before any development activities were initiated.

Moreover, tourism industry would help in providing employment opportunities to the youth, mitigate the problem of rural-urban migration and also assist the poverty

eradication policy. Since Assam and eastern Dzongkhags shared and enjoyed good trading relations, the development of tourism industry in the eastern Dzongkhags would also be welcomed and embraced by the people of Assam. Therefore, such potential and viable proposals and initiatives should be given due consideration by the Government.

In response, the Minister for Trade and Industry said that due to Bhutan's well preserved environment, rich and unique culture and tradition and good governance, tourists visiting the country had been increasing. However, the biggest stumbling block towards making the eastern Dzongkhags a tourism hotspot was the long travelling distance. Most of the tourists who came to Bhutan were senior citizens who could not travel long distances. Nevertheless, since the eastern Dzongkhags had the potential of developing tourism, promotion of tourism in the east had been prioritized in the Tenth Plan. Since road infrastructure was crucial for tourism, the Minister opined that if there was proper road infrastructure in Samdrupjongkhar, the entry and exit of tourists would be facilitated and tourism in the eastern as well as the southern Dzongkhags would obviously be promoted.

Although the Ministry for Home and Cultural Affairs and the Ministry of Trade and Industry had been holding discussions on the issue, it had to be suspended due to security situation in Assam. However, the Government was looking at ways to promote tourism in the east and other prospective areas of the country. As regards the possibility of Druk Air using the Guwahati Airport, the Minister informed the House that the Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Trade and Industry were in the process of discussing with the Government of India. If the security situation in Assam did not improve when the Druk Air starts its flight to Guwahati, the entire tourism industry would be affected and the country would run into huge financial loss. If directed, the Government was ready and willing to take the initiative.

The National Assembly noted that the construction of an airport in Trashigang, as assured by the Minister for Information and Communication, was indeed crucial. The Assembly directed the Ministry for Home and Cultural Affairs and the

Ministry of Trade and Industry to hold discussions with the Indian Government regarding the use of the Guwahati Airport. The National Assembly resolved that the Ministry for Home and Cultural Affairs, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Information and Communication, after proper consideration of the security situation and in line with the resolution of the 85th Session for balanced socio-economic development, should make efforts to promote tourism and other developmental activities in the southern Dzongkhags.

The deliberation on establishment of tourist liaison office in the eastern region concluded on 3rd January 2007.

24. Ban on Giving Stone and Sand on Contract

The people of Sarpang Dzongkhag submitted that the Dzongkhag was in its development stage and required enormous resources such as sand and stone. There were many developmental activities such as the establishment of major industries and an airport planned for the Dzongkhag. However, the present practices of giving stone and sand deposits in the Dzongkhag on contract would lead to exhaustion of the resources needed for the developmental activities and would also lead to environmental degradation. Therefore, the people of Sarpang Dzongkhag requested the Government to ban the practice of awarding stones and sand on contract. In support of the submissions, the Sarpang Dzongdag added that people were primarily concerned because there were many developmental activities like the construction of an international airport, industries and residential quarters planned for the Dzongkhag. Further, the Dzongkhag had to build protection walls covering about 1,500 acres along the river *Mao Khola*, for which would require a lot of sand and stone. Therefore, it was suggested that the awarding of stone and sand resources on contract should be banned for the time being.

While deliberating on the issue, the members expressed that it would be difficult to realise the country's policy of balanced development if Dzongkhags having sand, stone or timber started saving these resources for their own development.

Moreover, the ban would be violative of the Geology and Mines and Forestry *Chathrim*s. Therefore it was submitted that the raw materials should be made easily available to every Bhutanese who needed them.

The Agriculture Minister said that the auction of sand and stones was being carried out by the Forestry Department according to the Nature Conservation Act and Forestry Act. It would entail immense difficulties for the construction sector in the event the natural resources which some Dzongkhags had in abundance were not auctioned. Hence it would be beneficial to maintain the present practice as per the forestry policies.

The Minister for Trade and Industry informed the House that of the many developmental activities planned for Sarpang Dzongkhag, about 1500 acres of land had been identified at Jigmeling for the establishment of major factories and an airport. There were even plans to expand the present Gelephu town. The *Punatshang Chhu* and *Mangdue Chhu* power projects would also be traversed through Sarpang Dzongkhag. All these undertakings would require a lot of sand and stone resources and in the event such resources were not closely available, it would be expensive and would entail immense transportation difficulties.

The Minister added that it was imperative to facilitate better and easy access of the country's few abundant natural resources of sand, stone and timber, for which it was essential to frame a price scale so that the cost of materials were reasonable. Accordingly, the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry thoroughly discussed the issue in the Private Sector Development Committee, and the Committee submitted its report to the Council of Ministers. The Council of Ministers had directed the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture to discuss the issue and frame appropriate measures. The Minister submitted that to facilitate better and easier access to the natural resources, the forestry and geology and mines *Chathrim*s would be studied and the report would be submitted in the next session of the National Assembly.

Likewise, the Agriculture Minister submitted that since it was essential to frame a price scale prior to the auctioning of sand in the country, the matter was submitted to the Ministry of Trade and Industry through the Private Sector Development Committee. However, before the matter could be discussed, the Forestry Department had taken the decision to auction because the season and time for lifting of the sand had neared. Although the natural environment rules stated that uncontrolled extraction of sand from the river banks would directly undermine the survival of endangered white bellied heron, upon study it had been found that these universally endangered water-birds did not necessarily roost on the sand. Nevertheless, these raw materials being essential in our development needs, every effort would be made by the Forestry Department to provide sand and stones on a sustainable basis.

The Prime Minister said that recognizing the importance of sand and stones in the developmental activities, the Council of Ministers during its meeting held on 5th December, 2006 had directed the Department of Geology and Mines and the Forestry Department under the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture respectively to discuss the issue and adopt measures to facilitate better and easier access of sand and stone materials. Since reducing the cost would facilitate easy access of sand and stone materials, the two Departments were also directed to frame an appropriate price scale and submit its report to the Cabinet. Based on that report, the Cabinet would investigate and frame a policy that would benefit all the Bhutanese people.

The Royal Advisory Councillor pointed out that the present practice of auctioning the sand and stone resources by the Agriculture Ministry directly contradicted Chapter 9, Section 13 of the DYT *Chathrim* of 2002. The Geology and Mines Management Act of 1995 clearly stated that the extraction of minerals and stones should be routed through the DYT and approved by the Dzongkhag Administration. The provisions of the two Acts clearly prohibited the auctioning of the natural resources.

As submitted by the Royal Advisory Councillor, the National Assembly resolved that the DYT *Chathrim* should be strictly adhered to. The National Assembly opined that it was important for the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture to collectively work on measures to facilitate better and easier access of sand and stone materials. The National Assembly resolved that the Ministry of Trade and Industry should consult with the Private Sector Development Committee to frame a reasonable price scale for sand and stone materials that should benefit the Bhutanese people. The National Assembly also resolved that the concerned ministries should hold discussions with the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs in reviewing the provisions of the Geology and Mines *Chathrim* and the Forestry *Chathrim*. After affecting necessary additions and amendments, a report should be submitted in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the ban on giving sand and stone on contract concluded on 3rd January, 2007

25. Change Dzongkha Development Authority back to Commission

The people of Nisho and Kazhi Geogs under Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag submitted that in keeping with the country's policy of preserving, promoting and developing the national language Dzongkha, the Dzongkha Development Authority should be converted back to an independent Commission in order to facilitate the Authority to shoulder and implement its increased responsibilities.

In support of the submission, the Royal Advisory Councillor, Deputy Speaker and the representatives of the people submitted that with the adoption of parliamentary democracy in the country, the importance of national language would be neglected and the emphasis on the promotion of Dzongkha could change. Since Dzongkha language was our unique national identity, His Majesty the King upgraded the previous Dzongkha Development Division into an independent Commission. However, in 2003, it was converted into an Authority. Members expressed that with the adoption of Constitutional Democracy, the Government plans and policies could also change along with the change in Government. Therefore, it was

submitted that the Dzongkha Development Authority should be converted back to an independent Commission.

In response, the Education Minister said that in 1971, His Late Majesty the Third King had commanded the establishment of a Dzongkha Division within the Department of Education, to develop Dzongkha as a written language. In 1986, His Majesty the Fourth King upgraded the Department into a Dzongkha Development Advisory Committee. In 1989, it was further upgraded into an independent Dzongkha Development Commission. In 2003, when the Government carried out the Good Governance review exercise it was converted into Dzongkha Development Authority, under the Ministry of Education. In order to further the efforts of developing and promoting Dzongkha, a 11 member Dzongkha Development Council was formed. This high level inter Ministerial Committee had been undertaking the responsibility of formulating and overseeing the important policies of promoting the national language. Today, discussions were being held to make Dzongkha Development Authority totally independent even for its financial and day-to-day administrative matters. Regarding the de-linking of the Authority from the Ministry of Education and converting it to an independent Commission, the Minister said that the functions in promoting and developing the national language had to be carried out through the education system. Therefore, the Minister suggested that it would be beneficial to retain it as an Authority.

The National Assembly noted that prior to the adoption of the Constitution, it was imperative to direct more efforts to enhance the promotion and development of the Dzongkha language which was our unique national identity. It was also equally important to maintain the emphasis and to keep the plans and policies unchanged after the adoption of the Constitution. The National Assembly resolved to convert the Dzongkha Development Authority back to Dzongkha Development Commission.

The deliberation on to change Dzongkha Development Authority back to Commission concluded on 4th January, 2007

26. City Corporation to be made Autonomous

The Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted that the present City Corporation under the Ministry was encountering immense difficulties while implementing its increased urban plans and policies. The Corporation had not been able to function properly and had not been able to achieve its objectives. Therefore, it was submitted that the City Corporation be made autonomous from 2008 with the adoption of parliamentary democracy in the country.

While deliberating on the issue, some of the members said that with the adoption of parliamentary democracy, the representatives of the City Corporation would be appointed as members to the Local Government Councils. The granting of total autonomy to the Corporation heightened the risk of misuse of authority. Hence it would be more appropriate to retain the Corporation under a Ministry.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Works and Human Settlement said that His Majesty the King had commanded the drafting of a new *Thromde* Act in accordance with the provisions enshrined in the Draft Constitution. There was no need for the House to discuss the issue because the governance of *Thromdes* would be clearly spelled out in the new *Thromde* Act. Further, in obedience to His Majesty's command the Local Government Act was being drafted by the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs.

Although full autonomy of City Corporation was indispensable, it was important for it to be self reliant and financially independent. Therefore, instead of deciding on the issue, the National Assembly should resolve to leave the issue to be determined in accordance with the provisions of the Election Act, *Thromde* Act and the Local Government Act. In the event the Assembly decided to make the City Corporation autonomous, it was very crucial to retain the principle authority to implement the policies with the Ministry.

The National Assembly opined that although city corporations were autonomous agencies universally, Bhutan had initiated the drafting of a new *Thromde* Act. The National Assembly resolved that the City Corporation should be governed by the *Thromde* Act as enacted by the National Assembly.

The deliberation on the need to make the City Corporation autonomous concluded on 4th January, 2007

27.Up-gradation of Wangdue District Court to Two Bench Court

The people of Phangyul Geog under Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag submitted that the Dzongkhag consisting of 15 Geogs and a Military Training Centre had one of the highest populations, but was without a Dungkhag. Since the single bench Court was unable to decide all the registered cases on time, the people requested the Government to upgrade the Court to two bench Court by appointing an additional Drangpon. Although it would entail additional expenditure on the part of the Government, the people requested the Government to consider the submissions for the welfare of the people.

The National Assembly noted that the issue need not be discussed since it was within the purview of Judicial Administration. The National Assembly directed the Legislative Committee to hold discussions with the Judiciary on its requirement and feasibility, and arrange to appoint an additional Drangpon as per the convenience of the Judiciary.

The deliberation on up-gradation of Wangdue Phodrang District Court to two Bench Court concluded on 4th January, 2007

28.Need for Geog Engineer

The people of Trongsa Dzongkhag submitted that as per the past resolutions, administrative officers had been appointed in the Geogs. Similarly, in order to

complete the Geog planned activities on time, the people requested the Government to appoint Geog engineers.

Deliberating on the issue, the members said that a single Dzongkhag engineer could not give attention to both the Dzongkhag and the Geogs because of which the Geog planned activities were delayed. In order to mitigate the problems, it was submitted that the Government needed to carry out thorough study on the appointment of an engineer in each Geog or an engineer collectively for two Geogs.

In response, the Minister for Works and Human Settlement said that in accordance with the decentralization policy, most of the responsibilities had been shouldered by the Dzongkhags and the Geogs. Bhutan being a developing country, almost 60-70% of the annual capital budget was meant for building vital infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, drinking water, irrigation channels and construction of Gup's office. Since these development activities were vital and needed to be continued, there was acute shortage of engineers in the country, and the submissions made by the people were genuine. The Minister informed the House that besides the Dzongkhags and Geogs, the ministries and private sector also faced acute shortage of engineers since there were only 267 engineers in the country. In some Dzongkhags, an engineer had to shoulder the responsibility of overseeing as many as 30 construction sites. Such constraints had a tremendous impact on the quality and timely completion of the construction works. Since Bhutan lied in a highly seismic zone, it was crucial to build the infrastructure to withstand severe earthquakes. The posting of engineers in the Geogs was likely to take at least 4 to 5 years because in addition to the shortage of engineers in the country, it had been found that not many students seemed to be interested in joining the engineering profession. The Assembly was informed that the Ministry for Works and Human Settlement was in regular contact with the Royal Civil Service Commission in formulating effective measures to attract more qualifying students into the engineering profession. The Minister suggested that the Assembly should direct the Ministry for Works and Human Settlement, the Royal Civil Service

Commission and the concerned Dzongkhag Administrations to collectively work towards addressing the problems of insufficient engineers in the Geogs.

As submitted by the Minister for Works and Human Settlement, and with a view to mitigate the problems faced by the people, the National Assembly resolved that the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement, the Ministry of Labour and Human Resources and the Royal Civil Service Commission should collectively hold discussions and formulate appropriate measures. The National Assembly also resolved that in the event it was not feasible to post an engineer in each Geog, an engineer collectively for two Geogs should be posted within 2-3 years.

The deliberation on the need for Geog Engineer concluded on 4th January, 2007.

XI. ENACTMENT OF ACTS

1. The Judicial Service Bill of Bhutan, 2007

Prior to the deliberation on the endorsement of the Judicial Service Bill of Bhutan, 2007, the Chief Justice of Bhutan presented a brief introduction and purpose of the Bill. The Chief Justice said that the Bill indicated that understanding of, and respect for the principle of separation of powers in government was the bedrock of any democratic State based on the rule of law. The Bill strengthened the view that an independent, competent and impartial Judiciary was necessary for the proper administration of Justice. The Bill established standards for ethical conduct for the judges and other judicial service personnel and was a comprehensive document, a structure for an independent, transparent and effective administration of the Judiciary. The Draft Judicial Service Bill was an important document to strengthen public trust and confidence in the judicial system and integrity of the Judiciary. It was also one of the components of the major judicial reforms initiated under the personal supervision and guidance of the Fourth King, His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The Chief Justice expressed his hope that the honourable members would provide support in the enactment of this important and indispensable Bill.

Deliberating on each provision of the Bill, the Chief Justice and the Chairman and members of the Legislative Committee responded very lucidly and coherently to the concerns and questions raised by the Prime Minister and the members. After a comprehensive and meticulous deliberation, the National Assembly enacted the Judicial Service Act of Bhutan, 2007 on the 16th day of the 11th month of the Fire Male Dog Year of the Bhutanese Calendar, corresponding to 4th January 2007, with the following amendments:

Section 73 on page 11 had been rephrased as “The Drangpons of the Dzongkhag Courts shall be appointed by the Druk Gyalpo by the warrant under His hand and seal on the recommendation of the Chief Justice of Bhutan as per the nomination by the Council from among persons having Bachelors of law degree and Post Graduate Diploma in National Law **with relevant subjects from Zhung Chhen_ and Dzongkha**, provided that the person has served as a Drangpon of a Dungkhag Court or Drangpon Rabjam”.

In Section 107 on page 16, the phrases “answer wisely “was deleted and replaced by the word “**enquire**”.

Sub-section (a) of Section 209 on page 28 was annulled

2. Labour and Employment Bill of Bhutan, 2007

Preceding the deliberation on the endorsement of the Labour and Employment Bill of Bhutan, 2007, the Minister for Labour and Human Resources made a brief presentation on the background, aims and objectives of the Bill. The Minister said that during the 34 glorious years of His Majesty the Fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck’s reign, Bhutan experienced unprecedented growth and development. Development, however presented many challenges and the country today faced the challenges of providing employment to the increasing number of educated youth. The Ministry of Labour and Human Resources drafted the Bill to address the challenges brought about by development.

The Bill had incorporated all the Rules and Regulations on employment in the private sector issued by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. The Bill would prohibit forced labour, child labour and discrimination against the job seekers and employees. The Bill also had detailed provisions to protect the interests of both the employee and employer. Since such a Bill was pertinent to address the challenges brought about by development, the Minister expressed his hope that the members would endorse the Bill.

While deliberating on the Bill page by page, the opinions and doubts expressed and raised by the members of the National Assembly were elucidated by the Minister for Labour and Human Resources and the members of the Legislative Committee. The National Assembly enacted the Labour and Employment Act of Bhutan, 2007 on the 16th day of the 11th month, of the Fire Male Dog Year of the Bhutanese calendar, corresponding to 5th January 2007, with the following amendments:

The phrase **“if the inspector believes that the conditions likely to endanger the employees and workers are present”** was inserted at the end of Section 27(b) of Chapter III.

After extensive deliberation on Section 39 of Chapter III regarding protection from prosecution, the National Assembly resolved to retain the provision without any amendments. Since a similar clause in the Information, Communication and Media Act of Bhutan, 2006 had been annulled, the Assembly directed the concerned Ministry to carry out a thorough research on its requirement in the Media Act and submit a report in the 87th Session of the National Assembly.

In Section 85 of Chapter V, a new sub-clause (g) “the employee has absented himself from work for a long duration, with prior permission of the employer” was inserted.

3. The Immigration Bill of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2007

While presenting the background of the Immigration Bill of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2007, the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs said that the Immigration Bill was drafted on the basis of the Citizenship Act of Bhutan, the Royal *Kashos* of His Majesty the Fourth King and the resolutions passed by the National Assembly. One of the main objectives of the Bill was to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the country since with the increase in the momentum of development process, the human traffic into the country had also increased manifold. The Bill consolidated the existing immigration laws and by streamlining the immigration procedure, the Bill would regulate immigrants and non immigrants. The Minister requested the members to deliberate comprehensively and enact the Bill.

While deliberating on the Bill page by page, the opinions and doubts expressed and raised by the members of the National Assembly were elucidated by the Minister for Home and Cultural Affairs and the members of the Legislative Committee. The National Assembly enacted the Immigration Act, 2007 on the 16th day of the 11th month, of the Fire Male Dog Year of the Bhutanese calendar, corresponding to 5th January 2007, with the following amendments:

In Section 6 of Chapter II, the phrase “**Department of Forest**” was inserted for the Section to read as “ All law enforcement agencies, such as Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Royal Bhutan Police.....Department of Civil Aviation, **Department of Forest** and

Section 19(c) (iii) of the Chapter IV was amended as “they shall obtain route permits to travel outside their area of residence and **identified area.**”

On Section 21 of Chapter V apropos immigrants, the members raised their concerns about foreign volunteers residing in the country. The members said that these volunteers whose finance came from donations and foreign aid were not subject to audit. The Minister for home and Cultural Affairs said that although there was no law in the country to govern them, an Act to govern all the non-governmental organizations and its workers would be drafted and submitted. The National

Assembly resolved to discuss the issue on foreign volunteers during the deliberation on the Non-Governmental Organizations Act in the 87th Session.

In Sections 26 and 39 of Chapter V of the Dzongkha text, the Dzongkha word “*Rigtset*” was amended as “*Lagtsel*”.

In Sections 116,117,118 of Chapter XI of the Dzongkha text, the word “*rangwang*” was replaced by the word “*khaylang*”.

In Section 148 of Chapter XIII of the Dzongkha text, the Dzongkha word “*Gyelchen*” for “major” of the English text was inserted.

XII. EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

1. Expression of Appreciation to His Majesty the King for the Establishment of Anti-Corruption Commission.

The people of Haa Dzongkhag submitted that the Bhutanese people were fortunate to have been blessed with the heavenly endowment of the *Chenrizi* in the person of our beloved His Majesty the Fourth King. The people expressed their heartfelt gratitude and deep appreciation to His Majesty the King for establishing the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Election Commission as preparatory steps towards the institution of parliamentary democracy in the Kingdom, considering the present and future wellbeing of the people and the sovereignty of country.

2. Expression of Appreciation to His Holiness the Je Khenpo

The people of Dagana, Paro and Tsirang Dzongkhags expressed their heartfelt gratitude and deep appreciation to His Holiness the 70th Je Khenpo *Truelku Jigme Choedra* for the hardships undergone and sacrifices made in travelling throughout the country to initiate and conduct *Wang, Lung, Thri* and *Moenlam Chenmo* for ensuring continued peace in the country, the wellbeing of the entire sentient beings, to prevent natural calamities and human conflicts in the country and in the world.

3. Expression of Gratitude to the Government of India

The people of Sarpang Dzongkhag expressed their unforgettable and deepest gratitude to the Government of India for providing security escorts to Bhutanese commuters travelling through the Indian states of Assam and West Bengal.

XIII. LIST OF DOCUMENTS DISTRIBUTED IN THE 86TH SESSION

1. The Judicial Service Bill of Bhutan, 2007
2. The Immigration Bill of Bhutan, 2007
3. The Labour and Employment Bill of Bhutan, 2007
4. The Implementation Status Report on the 85th National Resolutions Assembly
5. Reports on the Chukha Dzong Construction Project and Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project the
6. The Report on the Financial Irregularities of 2004 and 2005
7. Report on Improving Quality of Education
8. The Election Bill of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008
9. The National Referendum Bill of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008
10. The Public Election Fund Bill of the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008

XIV. CONCLUDING CEREMONY

The historic 86th Session of the National Assembly formally concluded with the offering of *Tashi Moenlam*, a tradition that symbolises the fidelity between the Druk Gyalpo and people of Bhutan.

Concluding the Session, the Speaker of the National Assembly delivered the following speech.

1. This momentous and historic 86th Session of the National Assembly which commenced on the 2nd Day of the 11th Month of the Fire Male Dog Year, corresponding to the 22nd of December, 2006 shall be successfully concluded today. I, on behalf of the National Assembly and on my own behalf, would like to extend a warm welcome to His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, the members of the Royal

Family, representatives of the international donor agencies, diplomats, the representatives of the Zhung Dratshang, senior government officials and other distinguished guests to this auspicious concluding ceremony.

2. This momentous and historic 86th Session of the National Assembly under the leadership of His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo has been able to conclude successfully by the blessings of the luminous benedictions of the *Triple Gem*, and because of the benevolence and guidance of His Majesty the King. The successful conclusion of the Session can also be attributed to the support of the representatives of the people who stood by the agenda and engaged in constructive deliberations. I would like to offer my heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo and the representatives of the people.

3. I would also like to thank the Zhung Kalyon and the Royal Advisory Councillors, who despite their busy judicial duties gave importance to the National Assembly resolutions and followed up on its compliance with the Ministries, Departments and Authorities. I express my sincere appreciation to the Royal Advisory Council for compiling and submitting the comprehensive Implementation Status Report on the resolutions of the 85th Session of the National Assembly. I sincerely hope that in future too, the hard work would be maintained and that you would submit better result oriented reports.

4. Similarly, I would like to commend the Chairman and the members of the Public Accounts Committee who, despite their official duties in their constituencies, gave priority and worked on the controversial agenda on Chukha Dzong Project and the Semtokha Dzong Renovation Project with all your dedication and sincerity. I express my commendation and appreciation to the Public Accounts Committee for their lucid and unbiased report.

In addition, I express my appreciation to the Chairman and members of the Legislative Committee who, despite time constraints, were able to review the Bills thoroughly for presentation to the National Assembly.

5. The resolutions of the 86th Session of the National Assembly have been read out and endorsed by the members. I request the members to immediately act on the resolutions which the Assembly had unanimously endorsed and copies of which were distributed to the members. The concerned Ministries should direct your relevant officials to carry out the Ministry related works in accordance with the resolutions. Since the agenda had been submitted by the people, it is imperative for the representatives of the people to explain the resolutions of the issues deliberated in the Assembly to the people in your constituencies at the earliest. Despite repeated reminders to the members to submit a report on the briefings and explanations on the resolutions as carried out by the members, most of the members have failed to submit the report in the past. I once again urge the members to submit your reports to the National Assembly Secretariat without delay.

6. It is my sincere hope that the community leaders would look into the difficulties and concerns of the people in your constituencies and appraise the Government on these issues. I also hope that the community leaders and the Government would collectively adopt measures to address these difficulties and concerns of the people.

7. I also like to inform the honourable members today that the 1949 Friendship Treaty between Bhutan and India has been reviewed and updated by our two governments to reflect the contemporary nature of our close relationship and to provide a foundation for the continued growth of this excellent relationship in the 21st century.

8. Discussions were conducted over the past few years by our Fourth Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck and senior leaders of the government of India. The text of the Treaty has been agreed by both the governments.

9. The new India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty is expected to be formally signed during the visit to India by His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Fifth Druk Gyalpo.

10. The government of India will be announcing the updating of the Treaty in New Delhi today and the Royal Government will also be making the same announcement in Thimphu.

11. I, on behalf of the National Assembly members and the people of Bhutan, offer our deep gratitude to His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck for this precious legacy bestowed upon us for the future security and sovereignty of our Kingdom.

12. I also, on behalf of the National Assembly members and the people of Bhutan take this opportunity to extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the government of India for their continued assistance and in particular, for their good will and friendship in updating the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty.

13. During the commencement of the Assembly, the Government and the people pledged their unwavering loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, the upholder of the *Chhoe-sid-nyi*. The vows which you have pledged and affirmed in this sacred Hall of the National Assembly should not be left to mere thoughts and words of mouth. It is important for you all to uphold and discharge your pledge to serve His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo with unwavering loyalty and dedication by both words and deeds and action and thought.

14. Ever since the introduction of the dual system of government by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the hereditary Monarchs of the Wangchuck Dynasty has upheld and promoted the monastic institutions and cultural centres which are the custodians of the country's rich cultural and traditional heritage.

Since the inception of the development programmes in 1961, Bhutan has witnessed phenomenal and unprecedented socio-economic development in the 21st century, which can solely be attributed to the hereditary Monarchs of the Wangchuck Dynasty. The hereditary Monarchs of the Wangchuck Dynasty are the ultimate source of both the present and future well-being of the Pelden Drukpa and

therefore, it is important that we strive to pursue the vision and goals with single minded thought and action.

15. As we all know, by the blessings of the luminous benedictions of the *Triple Gem* and under the benevolent and glorious reign of the hereditary Monarchs of the Wangchuck Dynasty, Bhutanese people have enjoyed unprecedented peace, prosperity and happiness. Let us all pledge and pray that Bhutan's security and sovereignty is strengthened for all times to come, and that the vision of Gross National Happiness is realized. Let us also pray for His Majesty's long life and offer our *Tashi Lekmoen* that the country and the people experience unprecedented peace and prosperity under the glorious reign of the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, who is the symbol of unity of the Kingdom and of the people of Bhutan.

January 8, 2007

Sd/-

(Ugen Dorje)

SPEAKER

National Assembly of Bhutan

ANNEXURE A

English Translation of the Speech by the Honourable Speaker at the 86th Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan

1. On the auspicious occasion of the inaugural ceremony of the 86th Session of the National Assembly, I would like to welcome Your Majesty the Fifth King of Bhutan, Members of the Royal Family, esteemed Members, representatives of the international donor agencies and Ladies and Gentlemen.

2. His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan ascended the throne at the tender age of 16 and ruled the country for 34 years, selflessly dedicating himself in service of the people, and has consolidated and crystallized the foundation of our country. His Majesty the King had assured the sovereignty and security of the Nation and led the country to unprecedented socio-economic development. What other countries took 100 years to achieve, our country, under the dynamic leadership of His Majesty the King, has been able to accomplish within a short span of time. I would like to submit that no deeds will be able to repay His Majesty the Fourth King, for bequeathing us a nation that has seen unprecedented balanced socio-economic development, peace and prosperity and ensured a secure, stable and happy Nation both for present and future generation.

3. The stage of development which the National Assembly has reached this far would not have been possible without the benevolence and continuous guidance of His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan. I, on behalf of the National Assembly would like to express our deep and heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King and we further appeal to His Majesty the King to continue to give guidance to the National Assembly and we offer our sincere prayers for the long life of His Majesty the King.

4. I would like to remind the members that based on the strong historical ties of friendship and understanding between the two countries, His Majesty the King

visited New Delhi, India from July 7- 8, 2006 and met with the concerned Indian officials. During the visit, Bhutan and India extended their agreement on Trade, Commerce, and Transit for another 10 years, signed an agreement on Cooperation in the field of Hydroelectric Power, and a protocol to the agreement on the Tala Hydroelectric project to establish the tariff for the export of power from Bhutan to India. I on behalf of the National Assembly would like to express our deep appreciation to His Majesty the King for further strengthening the existing ties of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

5. Similarly, under the enlightened leadership and profound wisdom of His Majesty the King, and the efforts of the Council of Ministers, Bhutan has been listed among the 32 least corrupt countries. Therefore, on behalf of the people and on my own behalf I would like to express our heartfelt appreciation to His Majesty the King and the Council of Ministers.

6. We would also like to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty the King for initiating the long term vision of Gross National Happiness, a noble vision that has been internationally applauded.

His Majesty the King was honoured with Conservation Leadership Award at a function hosted by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) at the Smithsonian Centre in Washington D.C. on October 17, 2006. The award which is one of the world's most prestigious awards devoted to conservation has earned further recognition to Bhutan. I would, therefore, like to express our deep gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the King for his far sighted vision of preservation and conservation of our Natural Environment. Further, I would like to remind the people of the importance of fully supporting the policy initiated by His Majesty the King.

7. Bhutan has also been identified as the No. 1 tourist destination for 2007 in an Australian Web Portal managed by Flight Centre. This is possible firstly due to His Majesty the Fourth King's wise leadership and guidance and secondly due to the excellent impression created by His Majesty the Fifth King's visit to other countries. For this, the National Assembly would like to express our deep

appreciation to His Majesty the Fourth King and His Majesty the Fifth King of Bhutan.

8. The Bhutanese garden exhibited at the International Horticulture Exhibition, the “Royal Flora Ratchaphruek 2006” at Chiang Mai, Thailand, was awarded the third prize out of 33 participating countries. This would not have been possible without the wise and enlightened leadership of His Majesty the King, therefore, we would like to express our heartfelt and deep appreciation to His Majesty the King.

9. Similarly, on 14th December, 2006 in the special sitting of the cabinet when His Majesty the King handed over his responsibilities as the Monarch and the head of state of Bhutan to the Crown Prince, His Royal Highness the Trongsa Penlop, the people were overcome with indescribable grief and sadness.

However, His Majesty the Fifth King is also very learned and has been formally educated not only in the country but has also studied in eminent and recognised institutions outside the country. Moreover, His Majesty the King has also developed excellent relationship with other countries and earned tremendous recognition. In addition, His Majesty the Fifth King under the guidance of his illustrious father is well groomed in our traditional *Driglam Choesum* and is well versed in the art of governance and statecraft. As the Bhutanese saying goes, *Pha Zang ge bu, Gye zang ge shup, Pha dra bu dra, ser lay koen*, we have full faith and confidence in His Royal Highness the Trongsa Penlop for taking on the responsibilities of the Fifth King of Bhutan.

10. I would like to inform and remind the members of the words spoken by His Majesty the Fourth King in a special meeting held in the cabinet, “I have achieved everything that I have envisioned including those which I believed were impossible to accomplish. This was possible because I adopted the policy that was most suited to our country.” It is imperative that all the people keep this in mind and from now on carry out their responsibilities following the noble path shown by His Majesty the Fourth King.

11. What is most important for every Bhutanese at this moment is that on this auspicious occasion after taking over the responsibilities as the Fifth King of Bhutan, His Majesty the Fifth King has graced the National Assembly Session for the first time. I, on behalf of the National Assembly Members would like to express our heartfelt Tashi Delek to His Majesty the Fifth King, may the Country and the people experience unprecedented peace and prosperity under His Majesty the King. I would also like to appeal to His Majesty the King to provide continuous guidance and direction to the National Assembly keeping with the changing times, as was bestowed by His Majesty the Fourth King of Bhutan. The National Assembly members repose our full faith and confidence and sincerely pledge our loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the Fifth King of Bhutan.

12. His Majesty the Fifth King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, was conferred an honorary doctorate degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics by the Rangsit University in Thailand on November 26, 2006. The National Assembly would like to take this opportunity to offer our Tashi Delek.

13. I would also like to express appreciation and gratitude for the selfless hardships and sacrifices made by His Holiness the 70th Je Khenpo in travelling to the remote Dzongkhags for conducting and initiating *Wang, Lung* and *Thri* for the welfare of the people and disseminating the Buddha Dharma.

14. I also congratulate all the new and re-elected Assembly members. As all the Honourable members are chosen with trust and confidence by the people, I have every hope that the members will engage in substantive deliberation keeping in mind the laws of the country, government policies and the welfare of the people without limiting to their own constituencies.

15. I would like to remind the members that three Bills have been distributed to the Honourable Members, introduced by the concerned Ministries and after being reviewed by the Legislative Committee. I would like to remind the members that since it is the responsibility of the Honourable Members to deliberate and make the necessary additions and amendments, the Bills should be carefully reviewed considering the welfare of the people and the country.

16. Before I conclude, I would like to inform the members that I led a three member delegation to attend the 6th International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD-6) in Doha, Qatar. On November 2006, I also led a five-member delegation of the National Assembly of Bhutan to attend the Fifth General Assembly of Asian Association of Peace held in Tehran, the capital of Iran. The Conference deliberated on the issues related to democracy, political reform, and effective governance, the role of democracy in development and combating poverty, as well as freedom of speech.

Similarly, in my place, a four-member Bhutanese Parliamentary delegation led by Dasho Rinzin Gyaltshen, Chairman, Royal Advisory Council, attended the 3rd International Parliamentarians' Conference on the Implementation (IPCI) of the ICPD (International Conference on Population and Development) Programme of Action (IPCI/ICPD) Bangkok, Thailand.

17. In conclusion, since the National Assembly is the highest legislative institution in the country, it is my earnest hope that the Honourable members would engage in substantive debates as per the agenda drawn for the Session. Lastly, I sincerely hope and pray for the successful completion of the 86th Session of the National Assembly.

TASHI DELEK!

Disclaimer

The Resolution of the 86th Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan had been translated from Dzongkha. In the event of inconsistency between the two versions, the Dzongkha text shall prevail.

