

**TRANSLATION OF THE PROCEEDINGS AND RESOLUTIONS OF THE 76TH
SESSION OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF BHUTAN HELD FROM THE FIFTH
DAY OF THE FIFTH MONTH TO THE SEVENTH DAY OF THE SIXTH MONTH OF
THE MALE EARTH TIGER YEAR (JUNE 29TH TO JULY 30TH, 1998)**

I. OPENING CEREMONY

The 76th Session of the National Assembly of Bhutan commenced on the Fifth Day of the auspicious Fifth Month of the Male Earth Tiger Year corresponding to 29th June 1998 with the arrival of His Majesty the King in the traditional Chipdrel ceremony followed by the performance of the auspicious Zhugdrel Phunsum Tsogpai Tendrel.

In his opening address, the Speaker of the National Assembly, Dasho Kinzang Dorji, welcomed His Majesty the King, the representatives of the Dratshang and Rabdeys, the government representatives, people's representatives (Chimis) and the candidates who had come from the Dzongkhags for the election of six new Royal Advisory Councillors. The Speaker also extended a warm Tashi Delek and welcomed the new Chimis and representatives of the Dratshang and the government. He reminded them of their important responsibilities as members of the National Assembly and emphasized the need for them to participate sincerely and thoughtfully in the decision-making process of the country.

The Speaker informed the members that despite a late start on the path of modern development, Bhutan is today regarded as a 'success story', a country that has developed and achieved remarkable success within a very short span of time. Bhutan had achieved unprecedented development and progress without eroding the values of its age-old culture and traditions. This has been possible only because of the wise and farsighted leadership of our beloved monarchs. Except for a few sages, able to see into the future, no one could have imagined the tremendous pace of socio-economic development that has taken place in Bhutan today. The Speaker added that the socio-economic development that Bhutan has achieved surpassed all expectations and all the members are well aware of the peace and prosperity that the people have enjoyed. He pointed out that such remarkable progress has been possible only because of His Majesty's wise and far-sighted leadership.

As everyone is aware, His Majesty the King had to ascend the golden throne and take on the full responsibility of governing the country when he was only 16 years old. In the 26 years of his reign His Majesty has always kept the interest of the country foremost in his

mind and led the country into an era of even greater peace and happiness. Above all, His Majesty has further strengthened the sovereignty and security of the country for the benefit of future Bhutanese generations.

The Speaker informed the house that Bhutan has been able to meet its recurrent expenditures from its internal revenue for the last three years and also has a hard currency reserve which can meet its import requirements for two years. Few developing countries have achieved such economic success. This has been possible, despite many problems, solely because of His Majesty's deep commitment and continued efforts to ensure peace and prosperity for the Bhutanese people. All members of the house should, therefore, offer their sincere appreciation and heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King. The Speaker also pointed out that Bhutan is one of the least taxed countries in the world and the tax paid by the people is only a token amount. In short, one cannot help but realize with deep appreciation that the people of the Palden Drukpa have never enjoyed as much peace, happiness and prosperity as they do today .

The Speaker also reminded the members that His Majesty has successfully thwarted the repeated attempts by the ngolops and their supporters, motivated by selfish desires and vested interests, to harm the Tsa-Wa-Sum. In the process, His Majesty has further strengthened the security and the sovereignty of the country. The National Assembly, in its previous sessions, had deliberated at length on the threat from ngolops to the security of the country and many points of view from the people had also been submitted in the course of the deliberations. Due to the collective good fortune of the Bhutanese people, His Majesty the King had taken the full responsibility of solving the ngolop problem and because of his wise actions the ngolops could not achieve their objectives and have been unable to harm the peace and stability of the country.

The Speaker informed the house that the 76th Session of the National Assembly will begin with the reading out of His Majesty the King's Kasho to the Speaker, a copy of which would be distributed to the members. He reminded the members that His Majesty the King had always worked single-mindedly to promote the welfare of the country, and had also been a constant source of inspiration and guidance to the members of the National Assembly. Pointing out that the command of His Majesty the King is heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold, the Speaker called upon the members to give special attention to the precious Kasho issued by His Majesty the King. They must fully understand the content and implications of the Kasho, and setting aside all self-interest,

deliberate on the Kasho in keeping with the noble visions of His Majesty, to safeguard both the present and future interests of the country.

In conclusion, the Speaker reminded the members that they are the chosen representatives of their constituencies with the mandate to represent the Dratshang, Rabdeys, the government and the people in the highest national forum in the country. The Speaker urged the members to take active part in the deliberations and express their views frankly, always keeping in mind the interest and well-being of the country.

After the opening address, the 76th Session of the National Assembly commenced with the reading of His Majesty the King's Kasho to the Speaker. Copies of the Kasho were then distributed to the members.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF KASHO ISSUED TO THE SPEAKER
OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

This is to apprise the Speaker of the Tshogdu Chhenmo that a matter of great importance, for the present as well as the future well-being and security of our country, needs to be discussed and decided by the Tshogdu Chhenmo during its forthcoming 76th Session.

Over the past twenty six years of my reign I have, above everything else in my life, always put the interest and well-being of the country and people first. I have constantly strived, through the full endeavour of body, speech and mind, to bring progress and prosperity to the Bhutanese people and to safeguard the national interest and security of our country, the glorious Palden Drukpa. We can draw much satisfaction that during this period Bhutan has achieved rapid socio-economic development, which has brought about a better quality of life for our people, and its status as a sovereign, independent country has also been greatly strengthened.

It has also been my endeavour to encourage and prepare our people to participate actively and fully in the decision making process of our country. To this end a policy of decentralization was launched and Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchungs were established in all our Dzongkhags in 1981. This policy was given a further impetus in 1991 with the establishment of Geog Yargay Tshogchungs in all 202 geogs. Today, our country is progressing well on the path of socio-economic development and the people are also

playing an increasingly active role, through the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchungs and the Geog Yargay Tshogchungs, in the formulation and implementation of development programmes and in bringing forward issues of national concern for discussion in the Tshogdu Chhenmo.

The time has now come to promote even greater people's participation in the decision making process. Our country must be ensured to always have a system of government which enjoys the mandate of the people, provides clean and efficient governance, and also has an inbuilt mechanism of checks and balance to safeguard our national interest and security.

As an important step towards achieving this goal, the Lhengyel Shungtshog should now be restructured into an elected Council of Ministers that is vested with full executive powers to provide efficient and effective governance of our country

Therefore, keeping in mind both the present and future interest and well-being of our country, I would like to request the honourable members of the Tshogdu Chhenmo to discuss and take a decision on the following important issues during the 76th Session of the Tshogdu Chhenmo.

1. All cabinet ministers should henceforth be
elected by the Tshogdu Chhenmo with the first election of cabinet
ministers to take place during the 76th session.
2. A decision should be taken on the role and responsibilities
of the Lhengyel Shungtshog.
3. The Tshogdu Chhenmo should have a
mechanism to move a vote of confidence
in His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo.

Having given considerable thought to these important issues, I would like to share my views on them with the honourable members of the Tshogdu Chhenmo so that this matter of great national importance can be fruitfully discussed and unanimously decided during the 76th Session. The honourable members may wish to consider my thoughts and views, given below, as a guideline for our deliberations on the restructuring of the Lhengyel Shungtshog and the devolution of full executive powers of governance to an elected Council of Ministers.

The Lhengyel Shungtshog should henceforth comprise of elected ministers and the members of the Royal Advisory Council. At the present juncture, while Bhutan has many qualified and capable officials most of them are still very young and do not have enough seniority, in keeping with our tradition and culture, to stand as candidates for the post of cabinet minister. Indeed, it has been due to this fact that cabinet ministers have thus far held their posts for very long periods of time. With the passage of time we can expect the greater availability of qualified candidates for the post of cabinet ministership to ensure efficient and effective executive governance of our country.

Cabinet ministers should be elected by the Tshogdu Chhenmo through secret ballot. To ensure efficient executive governing of the country, the candidates should be selected from among persons who have held senior government posts at the rank of Secretary to the Royal Government or above. A candidate must secure a majority of the votes cast to be considered elected.

The portfolios for the elected ministers of the Lhengyel Shungtshog should be awarded by His Majesty the King.

A cabinet minister should serve for a term of five years after which the minister should face a vote of confidence in the Tshogdu Chhenmo.

All decisions adopted by the Lhengyel Shungtshog will be based on consensus. While the Lhengyel Shungtshog shall govern Bhutan with full executive powers, it must also keep His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo fully informed on all matters that concern the security and sovereignty of our country.

A Chathrim for the Lhengyel Shungtshog should be framed by a Committee comprising of members of the government, Clergy and people's representatives of the 20 Dzongkhags in the Tshogdu Chhenmo, and it should be duly presented for enactment by the Tshogdu Chhenmo during its 77th Session.

Having observed the political systems of other countries, it is important that Bhutan should have a system of government that is best suited for the needs and requirements of a small nation like ours to ensure its continued well-being and security, and safeguard its status as a sovereign, independent country. Accordingly, an inbuilt mechanism of checks and balance is very necessary for us to ensure that the procedures for the election of cabinet ministers cannot be undermined and exploited by vested interests. This is particularly important for a small nation like ours which is located between two of the

largest and most populous countries of the world. In our situation we cannot afford to have the divisive forces of regionalism and communalism come into play in the election of the Council of Ministers.

To further enhance and strengthen our system of government, it is my wish and request to the honourable members of the Tshogdu Chhenmo to adopt a practice to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. A two-thirds vote of no-confidence by the Tshogdu Chhenmo shall require His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo to abdicate in favour of the Crown Prince or the next-in-line of succession to the Golden Throne.

Having taken into account both the present and future well-being and interest of our country, it is my wish and prayer for the Lhengyel Shungtshog to be restructured and full executive powers to be devolved to an elected Council of Ministers. It is of utmost importance that this matter is tabled for deliberation during the 76th Session of the Tshogdu Chhenmo and that a decision is taken during this session itself. Having always kept the national interest foremost in mind in everything I have undertaken, I wish to remind the honourable members of the Tshogdu Chhenmo that it is your responsibility also to keep the well-being and interest of our country in mind while discussing this matter of great national importance. I would like to request the honourable members to bear in mind that passing an unanimous decision on the restructuring of the Lhengyel Shungtshog and the devolution of full executive powers to an elected Council of Ministers will be very beneficial for the continued progress, security and well-being of our country, the glorious Palden Drukpa.

Issued on the Fifteenth Day of the Fourth Month of the Year of the Male Earth Tiger corresponding to the Tenth Day of June, 1998 at the Tashichhodzong.

Jigme Singye Wangchuck

Druk Gyalpo

The Speaker pointed out that going by the three important issues enunciated in the Kasho, it is very clear that His Majesty the King wishes to bring about major changes in Bhutan's system of government. He reminded the members that all the changes that have been initiated in the governance of the country have always emanated from the Throne. He also recalled that during the past National Assembly sessions the members had repeatedly pledged the full support and loyalty of the people, Clergy and the government to His Majesty the King and their full confidence in His Majesty's policies.

The Speaker called upon the members to keep in mind the importance of fulfilling His Majesty the King's command while deliberating on the contents of His Majesty's Kasho.

The Deputy Minister of Finance, Yeshey Zimba appreciating the noble gesture of His Majesty the King, stated that His Majesty the King, in his great wisdom, had issued the Kasho concerning devolution of fundamental powers to the National Assembly keeping in mind the present and future well-being and security of the nation. Accordingly, members of the Council of Ministers are, henceforth, to be elected by the National Assembly.

While expressing his appreciation for the Kasho he stated that under the reign of His Majesty the King, the people of Bhutan have been enjoying unprecedented peace and prosperity. Moreover, the stability and sovereignty of the nation has also been greatly strengthened. The overall development of Bhutan, he said, has won the admiration of many other countries.

The Deputy Finance Minister further pointed out that His Majesty the King has been serving the country with full dedication and love, always placing the interest of the Bhutanese people before that of His family and even His own life. Hence, he felt that it is not necessary to change the system at this juncture as the people and the King have full trust and faith in each other.

He pointed out that the present Kasho is a follow-up to the process of decentralization and people's participation already initiated many years back by His Majesty the King. Its purpose is to further strengthen and empower the National Assembly. Till now, the National Assembly had the important role of making policy and enacting legislations. Now the National Assembly is being given the important role of electing cabinet ministers. This clearly shows that His Majesty the King is confident that the people and the National Assembly are now ready to shoulder this very important role.

The Deputy Finance Minister said that the people of Bhutan and the members of the National Assembly should be grateful and happy at this magnanimous devolution of power from the Throne to the People. He, however, reminded the members that power and responsibility go hand in hand. The responsibility and accountability of the National Assembly members, he said, is now more heavy than ever before. The responsibility of the hon'ble members is to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with even greater loyalty and

dedication than before, they must place the interest of the nation before their own individual interests in all matters. He emphasized the need for the Assembly members to vote, in the election of ministers, with full honesty and complete disregard for sectarian or personal considerations.

The Deputy Finance Minister warned of dire consequences if the National Assembly members did not act with full responsibility befitting the additional powers given to them. He said that all members, irrespective of whether they are at home, at work or in the Assembly meeting must always place national interest before self interest. We must not become irresponsible and behave like a person over-burdened by an unbearable load, he said. The Deputy Finance Minister concluded his statement by urging the National Assembly members to deliberate properly on this important Kasho keeping in mind the long term interest of the nation. He called upon the hon'ble members to cast aside all personal and sectarian considerations that they may harbour whenever matters concerning the interest of the nation are to be decided.

Expressing his views, Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji said that even at the age of 16 years, when his illustrious father, His Majesty the late King had passed away, His Majesty the King had ensured that the Bhutanese people did not have to remain like "lost and helpless chicks without the mother hen." Having borne the full responsibility of ruling the country to this day, His Majesty had brought about unprecedented economic development to Bhutan and further strengthened its sovereignty and security with the people enjoying peace, prosperity and happiness. Now, while the people placed their total faith, loyalty and confidence in His Majesty the King and his wise leadership, His Majesty had issued this Kasho introducing major changes in the system of government. Although the command of His Majesty the King is heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold, I cannot help feeling that it may be too early to introduce such changes in our country at this juncture, said Dasho Yeshey Dorji.

The Bhutanese people have been enjoying a very easy and secure life until now like "young birds under the protective wings of their mother." We have not known any hardship since we are like children whose needs have always been met by their parents, said Dasho Yeshey Dorji. His Majesty the King's command is like the sacred teachings of a Bodhisattva and when we consider the contents of His Majesty's Kasho we are reminded of the saying, "It is easy to criticise others but very difficult when one faces the same situation." If the people are given all the powers as laid down in the Kasho there is every

danger of the forces of communalism and nepotism coming into play and vested interests taking over. Such powers should be given only to persons who are fully committed to promoting the interest of the country and the welfare of the people instead of their own personal interests. Therefore, the devolution of power to the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers should not be decided without extensive deliberation and careful consideration of the matter.

The Deputy Minister for Health and Education, Dasho Sangay Ngedup spoke of the selfless sacrifice His Majesty the King has made for the well-being of the people and for the peace and security of the Kingdom. He compared these sacrifices with that made by a King in the fable of the Golden Moon wherein a King of a poor country worked day and night and also prayed for the well-being of his subjects. One day God appears before him in the form of a Golden Moon and agrees to fulfill all the King's wishes. For each wish fulfilled he must give a part of himself in return. Eventually, the King, having parted with his eyes and limbs, even sacrifices his own life for the peace and security of his country.

Expressing his concern over the contents of the Kasho, Dasho Sangay Ngedup said that the Kasho of His Majesty the King to the National Assembly is the start of a new era in the history of the country. He pointed out that the new era brings enhanced responsibilities and accountability to the members of the nation's highest legislative body. His Majesty the King, has sacrificed for the people of Bhutan more than He has done for Himself and His children. The successive monarchs of our country, particularly His Majesty the King has established many basic infrastructures such as schools, hospitals and agriculture centers. He has also strengthened the peace, sovereignty and security of the country. At a time when the country is enjoying unprecedented peace and prosperity, the contents of His Majesty's Kasho, as already submitted by the other members, seems like imposing a heavy responsibility on a mere child, he said. However, His Majesty the King, keeping in mind the present and future interests of the country, must have issued the Kasho after immense consideration of the matter, and, therefore, it is very important that the hon'ble members deliberate intensively on the matter. He said that with the great responsibility placed on their shoulders the members of the Assembly will now begin to understand the sacrifices made by His Majesty the King and the dimension of the responsibilities His Majesty has borne for the sake of his country and people. They will then offer their gratitude to His Majesty from the depth of their hearts with folded hands and realize the true greatness of our beloved monarch.

The Thimphu Chimi expressed his hope and prayer that the farsighted policies of His Majesty the King, as laid down in His Kasho, for the benefit of the country of the Palden Drukpa for all time to come will be successfully achieved. While considering the noble commands in His Majesty's Kasho, it is clear that extensive powers have been given to the National Assembly. At the same time this also seems like asking a physically weak person to carry a very heavy load which is beyond his capacity. As the saying goes, "the wise think before they act while the foolish only regret their mistakes," we must give careful consideration to this matter, he said.

The Lhuentse Dzongda noted that His Majesty's Kasho empowered the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers through secret ballot. At a time when the people of Bhutan are enjoying peace and happiness along with the benefits of unprecedented socio-economic development, all of which have been made possible because of His Majesty the King's wise leadership, the most important point to keep in mind is for the government and the people to act as one in the service of the country with total loyalty and dedication. Such unity, loyalty and dedication is particularly important at a time when the country is facing a threat to its security from the ngolop problem and the problem of the Bodo and ULFA militants from Assam. The introduction of a system of electing cabinet ministers will lead to divisive politics based on regionalism and communalism and the promotion of individual interests. As the vast majority of the people who live in the rural areas will be in no position to know the qualities and capabilities of the ministers and government officials or their thinkings, the ambitions of a few individuals bent upon gaining personal influence and power can create divisions and problems among the people. When the power which has been vested in one person is divided among different persons, the loyalty and thinking of the people will also be divided. This can lead to internal conflicts and problems. It will also enable outsiders and vested interests to use financial power to buy influence in the country, thereby endangering its very sovereignty and security.

The Chimi of Kawang Geog in Thimphu Dzongkhag and Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering expressed their deep gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the King for promoting the active participation of the people in the decision making process which had been decentralised over the years for their benefit, and now giving them the power to elect cabinet ministers. However, there is a serious danger that electoral outcomes could be determined by vested interests and money power. Therefore, it would be best if the appointment of cabinet ministers is left upto His Majesty the King, as in the past, while their term of office should be fixed for five years in accordance with His

Majesty's Kasho. The election of Royal Advisory Councillors has already shown that personal likes and dislikes, and communal feelings come into play in the course of the elections. They expressed deep concern that if cabinet ministers are to be elected such divisive forces may surface more strongly and even affect the security of the country.

In response, Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Goem Dorji noted that some members, being aware of the saying that "the stripes of a tiger are clearly visible on the outside while the character of a person is hidden inside," were apparently concerned that it may be detrimental if incapable candidates are elected as cabinet ministers. However, since the candidates for cabinet ministership would be selected from amongst senior officials of the rank of Secretary to the Government and above, there should be no need for any concern regarding their capabilities. A civil service officer begins his career after college at Grade VIII and only the most capable and proven officers will reach the rank of Secretary at Grade I after many years of service and experience acquired in the process. Since all candidates for cabinet ministership will be selected from senior government officials with the rank of Secretary and above, there should be no need for any concern regarding their capabilities. Moreover, since it is an initiative to which His Majesty the King would have given considerable thought, the election of cabinet ministers should be decided in accordance with His Majesty's Kasho.

The Chimi of Shelgnana in Punakha Dzongkhag pointed out that from the tender age of 16 years His Majesty the King, always taking the right decisions, had ruled Bhutan with such far-sighted wisdom as to be like the light which dispels darkness, for which the people of Bhutan are forever grateful. Regarding the election of cabinet ministers from among senior officials holding the rank of Secretary and above, since the people have no dealings with the candidates it will be difficult for them to know how they think or how they have been fulfilling their responsibilities in government service.

Even though Bhutan has a strong legal system, if the practice, as in the past, of appointing cabinet ministers by His Majesty the King is not maintained, there is a grave danger that our country with the cherished system of hereditary monarchy can be reduced to anarchy, said the Chimi. Different people will think in different ways even where it concerns national interest. With the passage of time, people will develop increasing wants and ambitions even as they become more well educated. While it is all right to have a term of five years for cabinet ministers, as given in His Majesty's Kasho, the question of how well an elected Council of Ministers will be able to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum must be given

serious consideration. I wonder whether the change in the system will be able to ensure that our future generations will enjoy the peace and happiness that we enjoy today, he said. Quoting a traditional saying, “if the wrong path is taken during a journey only time is lost but if a wrong policy is followed the whole world may be affected,” the Chimi called for careful deliberation on the issue before taking any decision. He pointed out that a person only has to look at how governments function in neighbouring countries to observe the drawbacks and disadvantages of an elected Council of Ministers. As there is every possibility for elected ministers to think differently and promote their own interests, the matter should not be decided without giving it serious thought and consideration.

The Chimi of Sombekha and Samar geogs in Haa Dzongkhag reminded the members that when it comes to such important issues of national concern, the Assembly must always look ahead and consider both the present well-being and future security of the country. He said that the granting of power to the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers through secret ballot, as laid down in His Majesty’s Kasho, is like asking a child to carry a spear before he can even carry an arrow.

Although the National Assembly is the highest legislative body in the country, it meets only once a year. On the other hand, the Council of Ministers must meet regularly and frequently to discuss and decide matters of national importance. As submitted by the other members, the appointment of cabinet ministers should continue to be done by His Majesty the King under whose reign the people of Bhutan have been enjoying peace and prosperity ever since he ascended the golden throne. Regarding the tenure of cabinet ministers, past sessions had specified a five-year term of office. However, as pointed out in His Majesty’s Kasho, although there were many qualified and capable officials most of them were very young and did not have the required seniority for cabinet posts, and therefore the former cabinet ministers had held their posts for long periods of time. While it is all right to decide on a five-year tenure for cabinet ministers, as laid down in His Majesty’s Kasho, the ministers should continue to be appointed by His Majesty the King, said the Chimi. He pointed out that there is no need to change this system as the cabinet ministers appointed by His Majesty from among the senior government officials had all discharged their responsibilities and served the country well.

The Chimi of Chhoeckhor Geog in Bumthang Dzongkhag expressed his concern that it was too early to implement the first point in His Majesty’s Kasho, namely to change the existing system of appointing cabinet ministers. If the cabinet ministers are to be elected

by the National Assembly, the members will have no way of determining how devoted the ministers will be in the service of the government and the people or how capable they are. Only His Majesty the King will be able to assess and select the best candidates. It is also doubtful whether the electoral process will be smooth and free of problems. Rather than electing the cabinet ministers through secret ballot, it will be much better if His Majesty the King nominated the candidates and the National Assembly endorsed the nominations.

The Chimi of Lugnyi geog in Paro Dzongkhag and the Chimi of Chhume Geog in Bumthang Dzongkhag suggested that it will be better if His Majesty the King's Kasho, proposing that cabinet ministers should be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot, is first explained by the Chimis to the people in their respective constituencies and the views of the people are then submitted during the next session of the National Assembly.

The Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Goem Dorji pointed out that His Majesty the King, always keeping the welfare and interest of the people at heart ever since he had ascended the golden throne, had been decentralising the decision-making process and devolving powers to the people through the establishment of District Development Committees and Block Development Committees. As a result, all development programmes under the Five-Year Plans had been successfully implemented. His Majesty had issued the Kasho to the Speaker of the National Assembly with a view to further decentralise the decision making process. Some of the hon'ble members have expressed their concern that problems might arise if the people are given more responsibilities and power than they are capable of shouldering. However, the country is now well on the path of progress and there are more and more qualified and well-educated people emerging every year who will be able to shoulder whatever responsibilities are given to them. As such, he expressed his hope and confidence that the country will enjoy even greater progress and prosperity than before. Moreover, His Majesty the King has taken the full responsibility of resolving the problems affecting the security and well-being of the country. Therefore, the main responsibility of the hon'ble members is to ensure that the election of cabinet ministers through secret ballot is carried out without letting regional and communal feelings affect their choice and to cast their ballot on the basis of how well the candidates will serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry pointed out that His Majesty the King, who is a direct descendant of Tertoen Pema Lingpa, the King of

Tertoens, had brought about unprecedented socio-economic development and progress in the course of the past 26 years of His reign. As everyone knows, His Majesty has also promoted the Dharma side by side with the promotion of good governance in the country. His Majesty the King, taking into consideration the past situation of the country together with its present and future well-being, has taken upon himself the full responsibility of ensuring its continued security from external threats and internal problems and constantly endeavoured to achieve these objectives with far-sighted vision and wisdom. As a result, the people of Bhutan have been enjoying peace and prosperity.

He expressed his view that His Majesty the King would have taken into consideration both the present well-being and the future interest and security of the country before issuing the Kasho enunciating changes in the system of appointing the Council of Ministers. He pointed out that Bhutan is a very small country with a very small population that is located between two of the largest and most populous countries in the world. He felt that the changes proposed by His Majesty were being introduced to facilitate the implementation of important government policies. He pointed out that no problems should arise if the National Assembly decided to elect cabinet ministers from among candidates who have reached the rank of Secretary to the Government and above, as laid down in the Kasho, since the careful selection and evaluation process in the civil service ensures that only the best and most capable civil servants will reach the rank of Secretary.

The Chimi of Shaba Geog in Paro Dzongkhag said that, under His Majesty's reign, the Bhutanese people have been enjoying peace and happiness like a person whose thirst is quenched by the pure waters of a mountain spring and whose body is warmed by the sun's rays shining through the clouds. His Majesty has also resolved whatever problems that arose in the country without the people having to even miss one morning's work on their farms. On the other hand, His Majesty has devolved decision making powers to the people through the establishment of District Development Committees and Block Development Committees. On behalf of the people, he expressed his deep gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the King for all these blessings.

He noted that regarding the election of cabinet ministers by the National Assembly, some of the members have submitted that the ministers should be elected by the National Assembly, as laid down in the Kasho, while others have said that such a practice should not be introduced. On the one hand, to submit that cabinet ministers should not be elected by the National Assembly would amount to going against the command of His Majesty the King. On the other hand, endorsing the proposal is also a problem because there is

every possibility that a candidate who is elected could turn out to be far from loyal and dedicated to the Tsa-Wa-Sum no matter how capable he may be. Therefore, it is necessary for the National Assembly to consider this issue very carefully and carry out an extensive deliberation on it before taking any decision.

The Chimi of Khoma geog in Lhuentse Dzongkhag and the Chimi of Samkhar Geog in Trashigang Dzongkhag noted that His Majesty the King, taking into consideration the present well-being and future security of the country, had issued the Kasho calling for cabinet ministers to be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot. The command of a King is like the waters of a river flowing down the mountains, and the waters of a river cannot be made to flow upstream. However, as submitted by many other members, introducing a system of electing cabinet ministers could unleash the divisive forces of communalism and regionalism. It will be much better if the tenure of cabinet ministers are fixed for five years, as laid down in the Kasho, and the ministers themselves continue to be appointed, as in the past, by His Majesty the King from among capable officials who are dedicated to the service of the country.

The Chimi of Tangsibji Geog in Trongsa Dzongkhag pointed out that the devolution of power to the people has been an ongoing process initiated from the throne, and there has never been any demand to this effect from the people. When the Bhutanese people who were fully content with their lives did not even have the slightest idea about participating in the decision making process of the country, His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo established the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council, and also a judiciary that was separated from the executive government. His Majesty, our present King, further decentralised the decision making process with the establishment of the District Development Committees and the Block Development Committees as a result of which the people are actively participating in deciding matters that concern them in their Dzongkhags and geogs, he said.

The Chimi expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for issuing the Kasho calling for cabinet ministers to henceforth, be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot. However, the people of Bhutan are not ready for such changes and it will be too early to introduce a system of electing cabinet ministers through secret ballot. What is important is the tenure of the cabinet ministers which could be decided for five years as laid down in the Kasho. If a system of electing cabinet ministers is introduced there is a danger that it could result in the divisive forces of communalism and regionalism coming

into play. Therefore, it would be better if, in keeping with past tradition, the cabinet ministers continue to be appointed by His Majesty the King.

The Chimi of Mewang, Genye and Dagala geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag said that under His Majesty the King's wise and far-sighted guidance, the officials of the Royal Government had been able to successfully discharge their responsibilities in promoting the present and future well-being and interest of the people and the country. Looking ahead into the future, with a view to further strengthen the security of the country and promote the well-being of the people, His Majesty the King has issued the Kasho calling for cabinet ministers to, henceforth, be elected through secret ballot by the National Assembly from candidates with the rank of Secretary to the Government and above. However, as the saying goes, "since the human body is not transparent like clear glass, a person's character cannot be seen from the outside," it would be difficult for the people to assess the capabilities of the candidates. Therefore, it is very important for the hon'ble members to carefully consider the contents of His Majesty the King's Kasho before taking any further decision.

The Tsirang Chimi said that it is the responsibility of the National Assembly members to support His Majesty the King's Kasho whereby cabinet ministers will be elected through secret ballot. He expressed his deep appreciation for the changes proposed in the Kasho and endorsed the five-year tenure for cabinet ministers.

The Chhukha Dzongda reminded the members that, in the past, when the country faced great difficulties and problems from internal strife, famine and diseases, a new era of peace, happiness and stability was ushered in with the establishment of the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. As everyone is aware, Bhutan advanced rapidly on the path of socio-economic progress under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King and even the recent ngolop problem could not harm the country's well-being and security because of His Majesty's personal commitment to resolving the problem.

He pointed out that even though Bhutan is a very small country, Bhutanese officials and cabinet ministers have proven themselves to be as capable as the officials of larger and more developed countries while participating in international conferences and interacting with their counterparts in international fora. This is evidence of the high standard of efficiency and capability achieved by Bhutan's civil servants. He suggested that since cabinet ministers are now required to be elected through secret ballot, the candidates

should be nominated by His Majesty the King to ensure that regional and communal considerations do not come into play in the selection of candidates.

The Sarpang Dzongda submitted that while discussing His Majesty the King's Kasho on the election of cabinet ministers through secret ballot, the hon'ble members should basically focus on the existing system in the country. Many members have already pointed out that we have a very good system of government under which tremendous progress and development has been achieved for the benefit of the people like darkness being dispelled by light, he said. When the country already has a very good system of government why should any changes be required? Why should a person who is not ill be hospitalised? The traditions of our Palden Drukpa are based on the values of Thha-Dhamtsi (reciprocal loyalty and commitment), Ley-Jumdrey (cause and effect) and the close bond between King and subject, he said. Therefore, ministers elected by the National Assembly may not have the same blessings of the Palden Drukpa as ministers appointed by His Majesty the King. It will also be difficult to know how loyal they will be or how they will think and act for the benefit of the Tsa-Wa-Sum. Although there may be many capable and qualified candidates only His Majesty will best know who will care for the country more and who will be loyal to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. Many of the hon'ble members have already submitted that there would be serious problems if cabinet ministers are elected through secret ballot instead of being appointed by His Majesty the King. It is important to look beyond a few years when considering the consequences of changing this system. We must carefully consider how elected ministers would carry out their functions and responsibilities 50 years from now and whether regional and communal considerations will come into play in the election of the executive government, he said. Moreover, when it is difficult to know how useful any elected minister will be to the country, the people of Bhutan who have no interest in changing the existing system of government will not be happy if they are told that cabinet ministers will henceforth have to be elected through secret ballot. However, if it has to be decided that cabinet ministers will be elected by the National Assembly, then I would like to submit that all the candidates must be nominated by His Majesty the King, he said.

The Chimi of Shongphu Geog in Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that the tenure for cabinet ministers should be five years as laid down in His Majesty the King's Kasho. However, we do not want a system of electing cabinet ministers because we feel that they should continue to be appointed by His Majesty the King, he said.

The Chimis of Zhemgang, Samdrupjongkhar, Chukha, Dagana, Sarpang and Lhuentse Dzongkhags submitted their views on the issue one after the other. They pointed out that Bhutan is a country where the Dharma flourishes and where there was a cherished system of hereditary monarchy. The system may be monarchical in form but in substance it has brought the people far more benefits, including freedom and equality, than any established democratic system of government. As a result, there is social order and stability in the country and the people enjoy peace, progress and prosperity. At a time when the country is enjoying such peace, progress and stability, the introduction of a system of electing cabinet ministers, through secret ballot, could lead to undesirable changes in the prevailing system. As a result, if elections are to take place as per the norms in democracies, people with vested interests could create serious problems that would affect the peace and progress of the country. Therefore, the existing system of cabinet ministers being appointed by His Majesty the King should continue to be followed.

Some members pointed out that the people at large are still in the process of learning to shoulder their responsibilities in the decision making process at the level of the District Development Committees and Block Development Committees established by His Majesty the King. The people are, therefore, not yet ready for such devolution of powers to them as envisaged in His Majesty's Kasho empowering the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers. As the saying goes, "one should not go out of the way to buy difficulties for oneself," introducing such a system could lead to unnecessary problems.

Other members said that the outcome of elections will be affected by money, influence and power. Discrimination on the grounds of communalism and regionalism will also take place. No matter how qualified and capable the candidates may be it is always possible for a person who does not care about his country to be elected as a cabinet minister, and he could harm the country just as the saying goes, "an evil person will harm the country and a troublesome bird will disturb the coop." Some other members submitted that the interest of the country would be best served if cabinet ministers continued to be appointed by His Majesty the King and, therefore, the existing system should be maintained.

The Pemagatshel Dzongda pointed out that His Majesty the King's Kasho clearly stated that cabinet ministers should, henceforth, be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot and it should be accordingly decided. What the house should deliberate upon is the procedures required for the election. He submitted that the candidates should be nominated by His Majesty the King, along with details of their bio-data and the number of cabinet ministers required, and the National Assembly should then elect the ministers through secret ballot.

Until now, cabinet ministers had long tenures because many capable officials who could otherwise have been possible candidates for cabinet ministership lacked the required seniority. Now that capable and qualified candidates are available, His Majesty the King has granted the opportunity to elect cabinet ministers through secret ballot, for which all the hon'ble members should be deeply grateful to His Majesty. At the same time, we must bear in mind that under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King, the past cabinet ministers have all discharged their responsibilities very ably and contributed to the progress and development of our country, and we should accordingly express our appreciation, he said. His Majesty's Kasho on the election of cabinet ministers by the National Assembly, through secret ballot, was issued with far-sighted vision and it should also be kept in mind that His Majesty the King's command is heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold, said the Dzongda.

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King suggested that the hon'ble members should focus the discussion on the different issues in His Majesty's Kasho, one at a time. It would be better to first discuss and decide the election of cabinet ministers, through secret ballot, by the National Assembly. His Majesty assured the members that, as requested by them, He would nominate the candidates for cabinet ministership along with their portfolios and their bio-datas. It would then be the responsibility of the National Assembly to elect the ministers through secret ballot, keeping in mind the interest of the country while casting their votes. For every minister, the hon'ble members will have the opportunity to cast their votes in secret in a ballot booth where there will be two boxes, one marked "For" and one marked "Against." A candidate who secures a majority of the votes cast, in favour of him, will be declared elected. In the event a candidate fails to secure a majority of the votes cast, a new candidate will be nominated by His Majesty the King for election by the National Assembly.

His Majesty reiterated to the hon'ble members that all cabinet ministers will, henceforth, be elected by the National Assembly. The power to elect cabinet ministers was being devolved to the National Assembly with a view to safeguard the national interest and ensure the security of the country and the well-being of the people. Above all, it is very important that the cabinet ministers have the mandate of the people to govern the country, His Majesty said. Therefore, it would be best if the hon'ble members decided that all cabinet ministers should be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot. His Majesty also suggested that, as given in the Kasho, a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers should be drafted by a committee comprising people's representatives from the

20 Dzongkhags, government representatives and the representatives of the Clergy in the National Assembly. The Draft Chathrim should be submitted for enactment during the 77th Session of the National Assembly.

The Speaker noted that even after extended discussions over two days the members had not been able to take a decision on the election of cabinet ministers by the National Assembly. His Majesty the King, after giving due consideration to the present and future interest of the country, had issued the Kasho empowering the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers. As clarified by His Majesty the King, the hon'ble members should come to a decision on the election of cabinet ministers instead of dwelling on unrelated issues.

The Chimis of Tongzhang, Jamkhar and Bumdeling geogs in Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that through His far-sighted wisdom, His Majesty the King had issued this Kasho to safeguard the present well-being and future security of the country. Having considered this carefully they felt that if the candidates are nominated by His Majesty the King there should be no problem for the National Assembly to elect the ministers through secret ballot. The tenure of the ministers should be five years as laid down in the Kasho.

The Chimi of Dungme and Khar geogs in Pemagatshel Dzongkhag, the Chimi of Samar and Sombekha geogs in Haa Dzongkhag, Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji, the Chimi of Mewang, Genye and Dagala geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag and the Punakha Chimi all submitted that His Majesty the King had been devolving more and more power to the people ever since he ascended the golden throne 26 years ago. Although the people made no demands and, in fact, had no idea or interest in taking part in the decision making process, His Majesty had established District Development Committees in all 20 Dzongkhags, followed later by the establishment of Block Development Committees. Also, every person in Bhutan, even the simplest farmer from the remotest village, had the right and opportunity to appeal to His Majesty the King on any Kidu or problem he or she may face.

Now, His Majesty was empowering the people to elect cabinet ministers as is evident from the Kasho issued under royal signature. However, this being a new system, the members expressed their concern that it would be difficult to assess who will be the best and most able candidates. As a result, money power may overshadow the quality of candidates and determine the outcome of elections. As His Majesty's judgement is a thousand times more sound than theirs, the members expressed their happiness and satisfaction with His

Majesty's clarification on the nomination of the candidates for cabinet ministership. Therefore, with His Majesty the King nominating the candidates along with their portfolios, and their bio-datas being made available, there should be no problem for the National Assembly to elect the ministers through secret ballot.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering and the Mongar Chimi submitted that although His Majesty the King's Kasho clearly stated that cabinet ministers should be elected by the National Assembly, they were deeply concerned that the elections might be affected by regional and communal considerations. They pointed out that communal feelings have come into play even during elections of Gups and Chimis and resulted in misunderstandings and problems among the people. Likewise, the election of Royal Advisory Councillors has also been affected by vested interests and communal considerations, as a result of which the best candidates have not always been elected. Therefore, while the term of office for cabinet ministers should be five years, as specified in the Kasho, it would be all right for cabinet ministers to be elected by the National Assembly only if the candidates are nominated by His Majesty the King.

The Chimi of Tangsibji Geog in Trongsa Dzongkhag submitted that if the candidates for cabinet ministership, along with their portfolios, are nominated by His Majesty the King the ministers should then be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot. Such a system would be in keeping with His Majesty's vision and the wishes of the people, and would greatly strengthen and promote the long term national interests of the country.

The Chimi of Chang and Kawang geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that His Majesty the King, keeping in mind the present well-being and future security of the country, had been decentralising the decision making process over the years. Now, His Majesty has issued a Kasho empowering the people to elect cabinet ministers. The Chimi expressed his support for a five year tenure for cabinet ministers after which they would face a vote of confidence. He said that since His Majesty the King has clarified that the candidates for cabinet ministership will be nominated by His Majesty, it should accordingly be decided that the ministers will be elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot.

The Chimi reminded the members that during the 70th Session of the National Assembly in 1990, in the course of the deliberations on the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan, His Majesty the King had taken upon himself the full responsibility of resolving the problem. As a result, the country had continued to enjoy peace and stability for which we are deeply grateful to His Majesty, said the Chimi. He pointed out that the Kasho which His

Majesty the King had issued was yet another manifestation of His Majesty's commitment to promoting the well-being and interests of the people and the country. As such, cabinet ministers should be elected in accordance with the Kasho.

The Chimi of Lamidara in Tsirang Dzongkhag said that although there was no need at this juncture for His Majesty the King to empower the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers, the hon'ble members had come to a consensus that if the candidates are nominated by His Majesty there would be no problem for the National Assembly to elect the ministers. Therefore, there is no need to prolong the deliberations and the issue should be decided accordingly, he said.

The Trashigang Dzongda reminded the members that Bhutan is a land which has been personally traversed and blessed by the second Buddha, Ugyen Guru Rimpoche. It has also been blessed by successive monarchs with wisdom and compassion like the Bodhisattvas. In his wisdom, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck the Third King had established the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council. We are even more blessed with His Majesty, our present King, who has constantly strived to promote the national interest and strengthen the security and well-being of our country through many far-sighted policies and initiatives, he said. Out of all these policies, the devolution of power by His Majesty is the most heartwarming and praiseworthy.

As submitted earlier by the hon'ble members, His Majesty had established the District Development Committees in 1981 to decentralise the decision making process and the Block Development Committees in 1991 to further consolidate the process at the grassroots level, said the Dzongda. Now that His Majesty is empowering the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers, His Majesty is giving all his powers to the people. Accordingly, all of us in the National Assembly must give careful consideration to the nomination and election of cabinet ministers, he said.

The Gasa Chimi and the Wangdue Phodrang Chimi expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to discuss at length the issue of electing cabinet ministers. Pointing out that even parents and children eventually live their lives separately, they also expressed their appreciation for the dissolution of the Council of Ministers and the retirement of the former cabinet ministers. Quoting a traditional saying, "When a person grows old he longs for his home, when a bird grows old it longs for its nest," they said that it was good for the

ministers to retire and give the younger generation of qualified and capable officials more opportunities to prove their worth.

They pointed out that in Bhutan it is His Majesty the King who has been giving more and more power to the people, without any request being made or any desire being expressed on the part of the people. The establishment of District Development Committees and Block Development Committees stood testimony to the devolution of powers by His Majesty the King. More than this, the members expressed their deep gratitude to His Majesty for not only issuing a Kasho empowering the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers but also for personally reiterating and clarifying the noble command during the deliberations.

Quoting a saying, “Even iron will melt if exposed to heat for too long just as water will become solid when kept too long in the cold,” the two Chimis supported a five year tenure for the cabinet ministers as laid down in the Kasho. They called upon the house to endorse His Majesty’s Kasho on the election of cabinet ministers.

After a very extended deliberation, the National Assembly resolved that with His Majesty the King nominating the candidates for cabinet ministership, along with their portfolios, the house will elect the new cabinet ministers during the current session itself through secret ballot. The tenure for the ministers will be five years as laid down in the Kasho. The elected ministers will be confirmed in their posts on the day they are awarded the Scarf of Office by His Majesty the King.

II. ELECTION OF CABINET MINISTERS

Following the endorsement of the first point in His Majesty the King’s Kasho that all cabinet ministers shall henceforth be elected by the National Assembly, His Majesty nominated six candidates for cabinet ministership along with their portfolios, and details of their bio-data. The 140 sitting members of the National Assembly comprising 10 representatives of the Clergy, 25 officials representing the government, six members of the Royal Advisory Council and 99 elected representatives of the people, cast their votes one by one through secret ballot on each candidate. The results of the voting were as follows:-

Ministry	Name of Minister	FOR AGAINST Total
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1. Ministry of Agriculture	Dasho Kinzang Dorji	126	14	140		
2. Ministry of Finance	Dasho Yeshey Zimba	132	8	140		
3. Ministry of Home Affairs	Dasho Thinley Jamtsho			120	20	140
4. Ministry of Health and Education	Dasho Sangay Ngedup	133	7	140		
5. Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Dasho Jigmi Thinley			136	4	140
6. Ministry of Trade and Industry	Dasho Khandu Wangchuk	127	13	140		

All six candidates, having secured a majority of the votes cast, were declared elected as cabinet ministers. Thereafter, on behalf of the newly elected ministers, the Speaker thanked His Majesty the King and the members of the National Assembly for nominating and electing them as cabinet ministers. He said that they were greatly honoured by the trust and confidence reposed in them by His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan, and pledged to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with utmost loyalty and dedication.

On the auspicious 10th Day of the Fifth Month of the Earth Tiger Year, His Majesty the King awarded the orange Scarf of Office to the six cabinet ministers.

III. ELECTION OF THE ROYAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

LORS

As the three-year term of the six people's representatives in the Royal Advisory Council will expire on 31st October, 1998 the following candidates who were each elected by the

people of the 20 Dzongkhags as their respective candidates, stood for election for the six seats in the Royal Advisory Council.

Sl. No	Dzongkhag	Name of Representative	Occupation
1.	Pemagatshel	Phanchung	People's representative in the National Assembly.
2.	Trashigang	Dorji Wangdi	Deputy Director, Ministry of Trade and Industries
3.	Trashi Yangtse	Seldon Dukpa	Headmaster, Tongshang Pry. School.
4.	Mongar	Tashi Dorji	Ex-Drimpon, Royal Bhutan Army
5.	Lhuentse Gangzur	Sonam Phuntsho	Gup, Geog, Lhuentse
6.	Bumthang	Jampel Ngedup	People's representative in the National Assembly.
7.	Zhemgang	Sangay Dorji	- do -
8.	Trongsa	Tenzing Dukpa	- do -
9.	Wangdue Phodrang	Sigey Dorji	Businessman
10.	Punakha	Goenpo	

		Tenzing	People's represen
		tative in the	National
		Assembly.	
11.	Gasa	Damcho Dorji	- do -
12.	Thimphu	Ugyen	- do -
13.	Paro	Tashi Namgyel	- do -
14.	Haa	Norbu Tshering	- do -
15.	S/Jongkhar tary Royal Bhutan	Tashi Dorji	Second Secre Embassy, Delhi.
16.	Sarpang	Dawa Tamang	Ex-chimi
17.	Tsirang	Dawa Sherpa	People's represen tative in the National Assembly.
18.	Dagana	Karna Bdr. Gurung	- do -
19.	Samtse	Chandra Bdr. Tamang-	do -
20.	Chhukha	Penpa	Businessman

On 2nd July 1998, the bio-data of the candidates were read out to the members and the house voted on each candidate through secret ballot. Leaving out ten sitting members who were candidates for the election, the remaining members comprising 10 representatives of the Dratshang and Rabdeys, 25 officials representing the government, six members of the

Royal Advisory Councils and 98 people's representatives, a total of 130 members cast their votes through secret ballot. The results of the voting were as follows:-

Sl.	Dzong khag	Candidate Votes secured	Total No. votes	No. of votes
1.	Pema- gatshel	Phanchung	35	130
2.	Bumthang	Jampel Ngedup	32	130
3.	Thimphu	Ugyen	21	130
4.	Haa	Norbu Tshering	39	130
5.	S/Jongkhar	Tashi Dorji	33	130
6.	Chhukha	Penpa	39	130

The above councillors-elect will serve as the people's representatives in the Royal Advisory Council for a term of three years from the day they are awarded the Scarf of Office by His Majesty the King.

IV. ELECTION OF DEPUTY SPEAKER

Following the command of His Majesty the King for the election of a Deputy Speaker, the Speaker of the National Assembly, on 2nd July 1998, asked the people's representatives in the National Assembly to nominate suitable candidates for the post. Accordingly, the people's representatives in the National Assembly conducted a closed-door meeting and nominated Chang Dorji, Namgyel Phuntsho, Gup Ugyen Dorji and Tenzing Dukpa as candidates for the post of Deputy Speaker. On 3rd July 1998, the bio-data of the candidates were read out to the house after which the members cast their votes through secret ballot. Leaving out the four candidates from the electoral list, the house comprising 10 representatives of the Dratshang and Rabdeys, 27 ministers and officials representing the government, six members of the Royal Advisory Council and 94 people's representatives, a total of 137 members, cast their votes through secret ballot. The results of the voting were as follows:

Sl. No.	Name of secured votes	Votes	Total No. of votes	Candidates
1.	Chang Dorji	14	137	
2.	Namgyel Phuntsho	42	137	
3.	Gup Ugyen Dorji	49	137	
4.	Tenzing Dukpa	32	137	

The representative of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI), Gup Ugyen Dorji, having secured the highest number of votes, was declared Deputy Speaker-elect. On the auspicious 10th Day of the Fifth Month of the Earth Tiger Year, corresponding to 4th July 1998, His Majesty the King awarded the Scarf of Office to the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly of Bhutan.

V. THE RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

Before the deliberations of the National Assembly began on the morning of 6th July 1998, His Majesty the King extended his Tashi Delek to the newly elected ministers, the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, and the Royal Advisory Councillors-elect. His Majesty expressed his hope and prayer that all of them will render dedicated service to the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of their knowledge and abilities, always keeping in mind the best interests of their country, the glorious Palden Drukpa.

On behalf of the members of the National Assembly, the Speaker extended a warm welcome to the newly elected cabinet ministers, who were attending the National Assembly for the first time in their present capacities, as well as to the Deputy Speaker. The Speaker then opened the deliberations on the second provision of His Majesty's Kasho regarding the role and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers.

The Lhuentse Dzongda, the Tsirang Chimi and the Chimis of Thimphu, Mewang, Genye and Dagala geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted their views. The Council of Ministers had now been elected by secret ballot according to the directive of the royal Kasho. The royal Kasho also decreed that the National Assembly should take a decision on the role and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers. Regarding this, the members

felt that the house could be guided by His Majesty's Kasho which clearly laid down that the decisions taken by the Council of Ministers should be based on consensus and that His Majesty the King must be kept fully informed on all matters concerning the security and sovereignty of the country.

However, what the hon'ble members really need to consider is the question of chairmanship of the Council of Ministers. If His Majesty the King does not remain as Chairman, the Council of Ministers will be like "a lost brood of chicks without the mother hen," and the people will also have their reservations about the Cabinet being chaired by one of the ministers. The members, therefore, pleaded for His Majesty to continue as the Chairman of the Cabinet.

On behalf of the members of the National Assembly, the Punakha Chimi offered his Tashi Delek to the six newly elected cabinet ministers and the Deputy Speaker who had all been conferred their Scarves of Office on the Tenth Day of the Fifth Bhutanese Month, the auspicious day of Ugyen Guru Rimpoche. He also congratulated the six Royal Advisory Councillors-elect.

The Chimi expressed his hope that the newly elected ministers, the Deputy Speaker and the Royal Advisory Councillors-elect will follow the noble path and deeds of His Majesty the King in their endeavour to fulfill the aspirations of the people and the trust and confidence reposed in them. He hoped that they would be undeterred in their efforts to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the country, always keeping in mind the saying that "enemies should be overcome through good strategy and friends won over with love" in the course of discharging their responsibilities covering both internal and external affairs of state. It was his hope that by following such a path the new cabinet members will not only accelerate the pace of socio-economic growth like the increasing size of the waxing moon but also implement the resolutions of the National Assembly in a systematic and timely manner and, thereby, realise the farsighted vision of His Majesty the King.

The Chimi also offered a prayer on behalf of the National Assembly that the Council of Ministers will dedicate themselves to the service of the three foundations of the country - His Majesty the most benevolent of benefactors, the royal government the most considerate and beneficent of governments, and the devoted and faithful citizens of Bhutan. Invoking the presence of the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa, he prayed

that the Council of Ministers will serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of their abilities and with utmost honour, loyalty and integrity.

The Chimi noted that since the newly elected cabinet ministers enjoyed the full confidence of His Majesty the King and the National Assembly, it should be all right if they elected the Chairman of the Council of Ministers from amongst themselves. However, since His Majesty the King has been head of the cabinet until now, it will be better if His Majesty continues to retain the chairmanship at a time when the new ministers will be taking up the responsibilities of executive governance for the very first time.

Regarding the drafting of a Chathrim (rules and regulations) for the Council of Ministers, as the saying goes “when there are too many carpenters the door will not be erected,” it would be difficult to come to any decision during the current session. As directed in the Kasho, a committee should be formed to draft the new Chathrim, taking into consideration existing rules and regulations. The Draft Chathrim should then be presented to the next session of the National Assembly for deliberation and enactment.

The Chimi of Tangsibji geog in Trongsa Dzongkhag pointed out that until now, with His Majesty the King heading the Council of Ministers, there had been no problems or inconveniences, not even the tiniest of problems that could be compared to the size of a needle’s eye. Although it would be onerous for His Majesty who has to attend to more and more urgent responsibilities of state emerging every day, the Chimi appealed to His Majesty the King to retain the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers. If the procedures for appointing the Chairman of the Cabinet needs to be changed it could always be discussed and decided by the National Assembly, he said.

Likewise, the Chimi of Chhoekhor Geog in Bumthang Dzongkhag said that it is hardly appropriate to comment on the roles and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers at this juncture. If necessary, the existing rules and regulations could be revised and additional clauses included. Otherwise, the Council of Ministers could function for the time being as per the existing rules and regulations, and the commands of His Majesty the King. The Chimi requested His Majesty the King to continue as Chairman of the Cabinet until its rules and regulations were framed.

The Wangdue Phodrang Chimi pointed out that rather than discussing the role and responsibilities of the Cabinet during the current session it would be better if a committee

is appointed, as directed in His Majesty's Kasho, to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers. The draft could then be discussed in the next session of the National Assembly. Like the other members before him, the Wangdue Phodrang Chimi also requested His Majesty the King to continue as Chairman of the Council of Ministers for the satisfaction of the people.

The Chimi of Thetsho and upper Nahi in Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag pointed out that His Majesty's Kasho clearly stated that the Council of Ministers should have full executive powers to govern the country. Therefore, the role and responsibilities of such an important body will have to be framed accordingly. The Chimi appealed to His Majesty the King to continue as Chairman of the Council of Ministers in the interest of both the government and the people.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Goem Dorji and the Chhukha Chimi submitted that it would be difficult for the hon'ble members to reach any resolution on the role and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers. They said that, first of all, His Majesty should continue as Chairman and provide guidance in formulating the roles and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers, and it should be decided accordingly by the National Assembly. The earlier system of appointing cabinet ministers had been changed and new cabinet ministers had now been elected by the National Assembly. If His Majesty does not remain as Chairman, the new cabinet ministers will have problems due to their inexperience in the affairs and policies of governing the country. After their five year tenure, if they are re-elected it would be well and good as they would then have acquired experience in the executive governance of the country. However, if they are not re-elected, then a new team of inexperienced ministers would again have to be elected and the same problems will be faced. Therefore, to reassure the people at a time of implementing and starting a new system, and if His Majesty does not wish to remain as Chairman, a member of the royal family should be appointed as a permanent Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

Supporting the point, the Zhemgang Chimi expressed his satisfaction with the results of the discussion on the directives of the royal Kasho for changes to be made regarding the Council of Ministers. He pointed out that while the National Assembly meets about once a year, the Council of Ministers has to meet frequently to discuss and decide many important affairs of state. Until now, with His Majesty as head of the cabinet, there had been no problems created for the government or the people. Under the golden reign of His

Majesty the King, the country has progressed and the people enjoy peace and happiness, and the fruits of socio-economic development. These achievements are well known all over the world. With His Majesty continuing as head of the Council of Ministers, the wishes of the people would be fulfilled, the country would achieve even greater socio-economic development and the people would enjoy more peace and happiness. However, if His Majesty did not wish to remain as head of the Cabinet, the people would be satisfied if a member of the royal family was appointed as Chairman of the Cabinet.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji reminded the members that the policy of giving full executive powers to the Cabinet was now being implemented. Quoting a saying, “the output of a hundred workers will be determined by a single supervisor,” the Councillor pointed out that for any work or activity to be successfully completed, besides a clear objective and goal, proper guidance and supervision is of absolute importance. A capable and efficient supervisor is indispensable for the timely completion of any work or activity. Likewise, the hon’ble members are fully aware of the role and responsibilities of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, he said.

Full executive powers have now been devolved to the Council of Ministers and the workload and responsibilities of its Chairman have accordingly become more heavy and grave. This is not to imply that none of the cabinet ministers are suitable to take up the chairmanship of the Cabinet. All of them are worthy of our trust and confidence but in the interest of the country His Majesty the King must continue as head of the Cabinet, he said. If it is not possible for His Majesty to accede to this request, then just as the saying goes, “to hold the milk of the great snow lion, one needs a golden bowl,” the Chairmanship of the Council of Ministers falls most suitably and rightfully on His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, Dasho Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuck. Why should we prostrate elsewhere when we have our Lama in front of us? From the point of view of policy or from the point of view of destiny, the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers in our country of the glorious Palden Drukpa and the cherished system of hereditary monarchy falls upon His Royal Highness the Crown Prince, said Dasho Yeshey Dorji. He requested the Speaker to consider his submission very carefully and conclude the deliberation on the lines of his suggestion.

The Trashigang Dzongda pointed out that under the wise and strong leadership of His Majesty the King, the people of Bhutan enjoy unprecedented peace, progress, and prosperity. Because of the far-sighted leadership of our hereditary kings, since 1907, our country, though small, is today a model of peace and prosperity in the world, he said.

Since the new cabinet ministers have just been elected by the National Assembly, thereby confirming the confidence of the people and government in them, we must all repose our trust in them, he said. However, since Bhutan is a country of the Dharma and the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, for the people of Bhutan His Majesty is the precious jewel, and is both “the cream on the top and the main substance in the bowl.” Tendrel (auspicious fortune) is very important for the Bhutanese people and it would not be good Tendrel if His Majesty the King does not continue as head of the Cabinet.

Upto now, all national plans and undertakings have been very successful. If His Majesty the King, in attending to other matters of state for the peace and well-being of the people, can no longer be the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince HRH DASHO JIGME KHEGAR NAMGYAL WANGCHUCK should be offered this position, said the Dzongda. As the saying goes ‘the son is greater than the father’. Even if this position is taken up in a nominal and symbolic manner, it would be good Tendrel and give confidence to the people, making them truly happy. Although His Royal Highness the Crown Prince is still young and undergoing his studies, His Majesty the King is at the height of his physical and mental powers. In my opinion it would suffice even if His Royal Highness the Crown Prince is designated as Chairman of the Council of Ministers only in name.

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King clarified that, having given the National Assembly the powers to elect cabinet ministers and also devolved full executive powers to the Council of Ministers, it should be understood that His Majesty does not wish to remain as head of the Cabinet. His Majesty had also explained that it is important to give full executive powers to the Council of Ministers. Moreover, as the hon’ble members would recall, His Majesty had already clarified that there are certain national objectives that have to be achieved. Whatever problems threaten the country today must be resolved and Bhutan’s sovereignty and security strengthened. His Majesty had also given His assurance that He will take the full responsibility of safeguarding both the immediate and long term interests of the country and ensuring its continued well-being and security.

Should any problem arise regarding His Majesty the King, it is of paramount importance to ensure that the security and sovereignty of the country will never be at risk. Keeping this in mind, it is to achieve certain important national objectives that His Majesty has decided to relinquish the chairmanship of the Cabinet. As Bhutan is a small country with

a small population, wedged between two powerful neighbors, His Majesty emphasised the importance of building a strong and effective system of government regardless of whether His Majesty continues as head of the Cabinet or not.

The Council of Ministers will now have to be elected through secret ballot by the National Assembly. His Majesty reminded the Assembly that He attaches great importance to devolving full executive powers to the Council of Ministers and relinquishing its chairmanship. His Majesty, therefore, requested the hon'ble members to attach the same importance to His decision on this matter.

His Majesty also pointed out that the royal Kasho clearly stated that when it comes to matters concerning the security and sovereignty of the country, His Majesty the King must be kept fully informed by the Council of Ministers.

His Majesty reminded the Assembly that, in Bhutan, His Majesty the King, the government and the people have always held free and frank discussions on all matters concerning national policies and the interests of the country. However, as already mentioned to the hon'ble members earlier, it is not convenient to discuss every policy in open debate. As is evident from a careful study of the royal Kasho, the very essence of the changes enunciated in the Kasho is that His Majesty will no longer be the Chairman of the Cabinet.

Therefore, as directed in the Kasho, a committee comprising representatives of the people from the 20 Dzongkhags, and representatives of the monk body and the government in the National Assembly should be formed to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers, and the draft should be submitted to the 77th Session of the National Assembly for discussion and enactment. As for the Chairmanship of the Cabinet, it should suffice if the elected ministers assume the post on a rotational basis. His Majesty requested the hon'ble members to keep these points in mind while deliberating on the matter.

The Chimi of Paro Shaba said that in accordance with the directives of the royal Kasho, and as submitted by the hon'ble members, the new cabinet ministers are "persons picked from amongst the numerous and selected from amongst the few," who have now been elected through secret ballot by the National Assembly. This is a development that should bring satisfaction and instill confidence in us, the people, he said. If it is not possible for

His Majesty the King to remain as head of the Cabinet, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers should then be appointed from amongst the elected ministers.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering reminded the members that His Majesty the King had long back introduced the practice of Gups, Chimis and Royal Advisory Councillors being elected through secret ballot. Several years ago, the practice of electing the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker through secret ballot was also established. Now, even cabinet ministers have been elected through secret ballot in keeping with His Majesty's directive issued this year during the 76th Session of the National Assembly.

Next to the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers is the most important decision-making body in the country. Since the election of cabinet ministers through secret ballot has been carried out for the first time, and such a system has just been introduced, there are many who have reservations about His Majesty relinquishing the Chairmanship of the Cabinet as it may cause problems for both the government and the people if His Majesty no longer holds this post. For the people of Bhutan, His Majesty the King is like the Lama who gives the teachings of the Dharma, the parent to whom everything is owed and the leader everyone looks upto, and under whose leadership we have all been enjoying peace, prosperity, and happiness, he said.

It is due to His Majesty heading the Cabinet upto now that the Cabinet has been successful in realizing the goals and aspirations of the government and the people. His Majesty is the precious jewel that represents the heart of our tradition, he said. Therefore, if His Majesty continues as head of the Cabinet it will make the people happier than ever before. Otherwise the main essence of the system will be lacking as the saying goes, "whatever ingredients make up the curry, without salt it will be tasteless."

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King reminded the members that He had already explained to them the reasons for introducing the changes whereby all cabinet ministers would henceforth be elected through secret ballot and full executive power devolved to the Council of Ministers, and why His Majesty was relinquishing the chairmanship of the Cabinet. His Majesty pointed out that if the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers is rotated amongst the elected ministers it will not create any misunderstanding or disharmony among them. His Majesty expressed his hope and confidence that the newly elected ministers, who are all young and competent, will work

together as an effective and well coordinated team and serve the country with loyalty and dedication.

The Punakha Chimi reminded the house that when His Majesty the King relinquished the chairmanship of the Planning Commission in 1991, the people had a lot of reservations and had appealed to His Majesty not to hand over the post. Today, when we assess the situation no untoward failure has occurred regarding the Planning Commission even after His Majesty relinquished the chairmanship, he said.

The Chimi pointed out that although His Majesty would no longer be the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, it is clearly stated in the Kasho that the Cabinet shall keep His Majesty fully informed on all matters concerning the security and sovereignty of the country. Therefore, the fact that His Majesty will not be the head of the Cabinet does not mean that he will no longer provide any guidance in the affairs of state. Nevertheless, going by the opinion of the hon'ble members, to allay the doubts and ease the minds of the people, we would be grateful if His Majesty the King could retain the chairmanship of the Cabinet, he said.

The Chimi of Lugnyi Geog in Paro Dzongkhag submitted that His Majesty the King should continue to be the head of the Cabinet and whenever His Majesty needed to devote more of His valuable time on other important national issues, He could command the members of the Council of Ministers to act as Chairman on a rotation basis.

The Joint Secretary of the Power Division reminded the members that His Majesty the King had firstly issued the royal Kasho and secondly explained the contents of the Kasho very clearly to the house. Accordingly, the house has elected the new cabinet ministers through secret ballot. Since the Kasho clearly states that full executive powers will be devolved to the Council of Ministers it will be better to leave it upto them to define how the Cabinet should function and how its Chairman should be appointed.

Regarding the role and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers, the Joint Secretary said that in accordance with the directive in the royal Kasho, a committee comprising people's representatives from the 20 Dzongkhags and representatives of the Clergy and the government in the National Assembly should be formed to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers. As the draft will be submitted for deliberation and enactment during the 77th Session of the National Assembly, any doubts on the role and responsibilities of the Cabinet can be submitted at that time. So, there is no need to prolong the discussion

on this matter. Pointing out that Bhutan has achieved unrivalled progress and development under His Majesty's wise leadership, the Joint Secretary expressed his hope that even greater progress will be achieved in the years ahead.

The Sarpang Chimi submitted that, as directed by His Majesty the King, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers could be appointed from amongst the elected ministers on a rotation basis.

The Haa Chimi pointed out that since the cabinet ministers had been nominated by His Majesty the King and then elected by the National Assembly through secret ballot, there was no reason why the hon'ble members should not have any confidence in them. Regarding the Chairmanship of the Cabinet, it should be left upto the cabinet ministers to decide on the matter.

He said that it is not necessary to hold a prolonged discussion on this issue when His Majesty has already commanded that a committee comprising people's representatives from the 20 Dzongkhags and representatives of the Clergy and the government in the National Assembly should be formed to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers, and that the draft should be submitted to the 77th Session for discussion and enactment.

The Chhukha Dzongda submitted that, although it was unbecoming of him to disagree with a royal command, the pain which he felt on account of the changes being introduced in the country at this juncture was more unbearable than the weight of the command itself. He reiterated the submission of other members that His Majesty should continue to remain as Chairman of the Council of Ministers and gave three reasons to support his submission. Firstly, while there is no problem in electing cabinet ministers as long as His Majesty rules over the country, and the newly elected ministers are all qualified and capable persons, in time, personal considerations and vested interests could undermine the system and create serious problems for the country. As it is difficult to predict how the new system will turn out, it is necessary to give deep consideration to this matter before arriving at a decision.

Secondly, Bhutan is a unique country where the government and the Dharma are equally important. It was Bhutan's great spiritual leader and statesman, Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal himself who said that "Bhutan accords high importance to Tendrel, and Tendrel should be observed." Accordingly, all worthy and spiritual undertakings are preceded by ceremonies to ensure good Tendrel. Therefore, it is only befitting that His Majesty the King should continue as head of the Cabinet to maintain the good Tendrel and the highly cherished system which Bhutan has enjoyed, for centuries to come, he said.

Thirdly, while other countries have a system wherein the position of Cabinet Chairman is occupied by a prime minister who is the head of the government, in Bhutan we have a cherished system of hereditary monarchy which was established by the Clergy, government officials and the Bhutanese people to rule and govern the country. Therefore, there was no need to create a separate position of Chairman of the Cabinet.

The Dzongda explained that he was making his submissions because of the profound respect and total devotion the Bhutanese people have for His Majesty the King and not because he lacked confidence in the new cabinet ministers. The powers which were exercised by successive monarchs until now are being devolved all at once to the Council of Ministers and the people are deeply concerned over the impact this will have on the country. He submitted that even though the elected cabinet ministers would fulfill their responsibilities, with executive powers now devolved to them, it will still be most befitting if His Majesty continued as Chairman of the Council of Ministers.

The Chimi of Chhume Geog in Bumthang Dzongkhag submitted that the members wished to appeal to His Majesty the King to retain the chairmanship of the Cabinet because it was under His Majesty's benevolent leadership that the people of Bhutan continued to enjoy peace and happiness. However, His Majesty has clearly explained his reasons for relinquishing the chairmanship of the Cabinet and His Majesty's clarification has been well understood. Therefore, it should be all right if the chairmanship of the Cabinet is filled on a rotational basis from amongst the elected cabinet ministers, he said.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Goem Dorji submitted that the new cabinet ministers who had been elected through secret ballot were all very competent, qualified and experienced senior officials. They have also never failed in discharging their duties during their long years of service and His Majesty the King has reposed his trust and confidence in them, as also the National Assembly by electing them. He reminded the members that although the Cabinet will function with full executive powers, it must keep His Majesty fully informed on all matters concerning the security and sovereignty of the country. Therefore, as already submitted by other members, the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers should be rotated amongst the elected cabinet ministers, he said.

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King said that in case some of the hon'ble members were under the impression that all decisions taken in the Cabinet would

be referred to His Majesty even though He would no longer be the Chairman, they should understand that this will not at all be the case. As clearly explained in the Kasho, the Cabinet will keep His Majesty fully informed on all matters concerning the security and sovereignty of the country.

His Majesty said that after 26 years of His reign, He had every expectation that the ministers and government officials would serve the government and the people with unfailing and selfless zeal and dedication. It will be very beneficial for both the government and the people to let the Council of Ministers function with full executive powers of governance, as stated in the Kasho, without His Majesty the King remaining as Chairman of the Cabinet.

His Majesty informed the members that during the years when His Majesty himself chaired the Cabinet, all issues of national concern were discussed thoroughly, with members expressing their views frankly, and the decisions were taken by consensus. Even His Majesty's own views and proposals were never accepted without discussion. Similarly, the new Council of Ministers which had been vested with full executive powers of governance, should also hold frank and thorough discussions on all issues of national concern and adopt decisions by consensus, His Majesty said.

The Chimi of Kashi and Nyishog geogs in Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhag submitted that, in accordance with His Majesty's Kasho, it was important to first appoint a committee comprising of members of the National Assembly to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers, following which the appointment of a Chairman could be considered. Since all the cabinet ministers are capable and suitable, the chairmanship of the Cabinet could be assumed on a rotation basis by the elected ministers until the Chathrim is enacted.

The Trashi Yangtse Chimi pointed out that, despite the repeated appeals to His Majesty the King to continue as head of the Cabinet, His Majesty had several times explained His reasons for relinquishing the chairmanship of the Council of Ministers. Therefore, the Assembly should decide that the chairmanship of the Cabinet should be filled by the elected ministers on a rotation basis.

The Chimi of Kawang and Chang geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag said that the 76th Session of the National Assembly had firstly resolved to elect cabinet ministers and, now, despite repeated pleas made to His Majesty the King to retain the chairmanship of the Cabinet,

His Majesty had not accepted the pleas. As a result, our hearts are breaking with these developments, he said. However, since it is important that the command of His Majesty the King be fulfilled, the chairmanship of the Cabinet should rotate amongst the elected ministers until a Draft Chathrim of the Council of Ministers, framed by a committee comprising members of the National Assembly, is submitted and enacted during the next Assembly session.

The Trongsa Chimi pointed out that the cabinet ministers enjoyed the trust and confidence of His Majesty the King and the National Assembly, and they had been duly elected. The hon'ble members are also aware of the qualifications and competence of the new ministers. Therefore, it should be left upto the cabinet ministers themselves to discuss and decide whether one of them should be appointed as Chairman or the post should be occupied on a rotational basis by them, he said.

The Speaker expressed his satisfaction that the second point in His Majesty's Kasho, namely the role and responsibilities of the new Council of Ministers, had been discussed at length over a period of two days, and the hon'ble members, having fully understood this particular provision of the Kasho, had finally arrived at a consensus.

The Speaker noted that, in accordance with the second provision of the royal Kasho, the hon'ble members had deliberated on the role and responsibilities of the cabinet, and keeping in mind both the immediate and long-term interests of the people and the country, had expressed their views frankly without any hesitation and concealment.

The Speaker also noted that in the course of the deliberations, His Majesty the King had clearly explained the reasons for devolving full executive powers of governance to the Council of Ministers, in a manner more caring and affectionate than a father giving advice to his children. The clarifications made by His Majesty had removed all doubts, misgivings and concern felt by the hon'ble members and the house had finally reached a consensus to pass a resolution in keeping with the second directive in the royal Kasho.

The National Assembly resolved that a special committee comprising the people's representatives of the 20 Dzongkhags and members representing the Clergy and the government will be established to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers. This Chathrim will be submitted to the 77th Session of the National Assembly for discussion

and enactment. Until the Chathrim is enacted, the chairmanship of the Cabinet will rotate among the elected cabinet ministers.

VI. VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE DRUK GYALPO

Opening the discussion on the third provision of the royal Kasho which required the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo, the Speaker noted that the reasons and purpose behind His Majesty's Kasho had been clearly understood by the Chimis. Two of the three provisions of the Kasho had been discussed extensively and the resolutions passed by the Assembly had been in keeping with the wishes of His Majesty the King. The last provision of the Kasho called for a decision on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. The Speaker called upon the members to participate sincerely in the discussion on this point, keeping in mind the present well-being and future security of the people and the country, and arrive at a meaningful and appropriate decision.

The Trashigang Yangtse Chimi recalled that in earlier times, every valley in Bhutan had its own ruler and every village had a dominating person as the head of the village. There was constant strife between them in their attempts to wrest power from each other. In the process the people suffered immensely, their plight further compounded by heavy taxes and woola (labour contribution). Poor and helpless people were exploited as serfs by the powerful and wealthy personalities of their villages and region, with entire families working for their overlords from generation to generation.

In order to end this state of civil strife and disorder, the Clergy, Ponlops, government officials and the people unanimously offered a Genja (pledge) of allegiance to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and enthroned him as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan in the Pungthang Dechenphodrang Dzong in 1907.

With the cherished system of hereditary monarchy providing good governance to the country, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuck the Third Druk Gyalpo established the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council. These institutions which did not exist before were established with a view to ensure the long term well-being and stability of the country. Similarly, the Thrimzhung Chhenpo (Supreme Laws) was drafted and duly enacted. To make justice fair and impartial, the judiciary was separated from the executive and made independent. Serfdom was abolished and every Bhutanese, whether high or low, great or small, was declared equal under the law, enjoying equal rights as

citizens and human beings. In due course, Bhutan was admitted into the United Nations where it has been playing its part as an equal partner in the comity of nations, participating actively and often chairing important international conferences.

The Chimi stated that the achievements of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, who has ruled the country from a tender age, are even greater. Making judicious use of the resources that we have and mobilising assistance from others to meet the shortfall, His Majesty has brought about tremendous socio-economic development and established a network of essential service facilities all across the country. For instance, a journey which used to take one or two weeks in the past when there were no motor roads can now be completed in one or two days. Those who owned horses and mules own motor vehicles today. Those who used to live in huts now own multi-storey houses. The peace and prosperity enjoyed by the people today is all due to the wise governance of the country made possible by the cherished system of hereditary monarchy.

The Chimi pointed out that among the three important directives in the Kasho, the first one calling for cabinet ministers to be elected by the National Assembly had been implemented. The second directive about the roles and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers had also been discussed and the National Assembly had reached a consensus which was consistent with the noble command of His Majesty the King. The third directive which requires the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo has brought deep sorrow to the people. While it is unseemly to disagree with a royal command, issued out of His Majesty's love and concern for the people, the hon'ble members should not endorse the introduction of such a disagreeable practice like moving a confidence vote in our beloved King. Instead, the members should resolve on submitting a Genja to reinforce the Genja submitted by our forefathers to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, the first Druk Gyalpo.

Taking the floor, the Trongsa Chimi said that ever since the session started, he had spent sleepless nights thinking about the directive in the royal Kasho that the Druk Gyalpo should be subject to a vote of confidence. The sorrow he felt was unbearable. There had been numerous rulers throughout Bhutan's history but they had achieved nothing significant for the benefit of the people. Rather, heavy taxes and woola, and constant strife had subjected our forefathers to much hardship. As a result, to bring an end to this unhappy situation, the Clergy, government officials, regional chiefs and the people had reposed their faith and trust in Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and enthroned him as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan. Since then, an end was brought to civil strife, epidemics

and famines. The sun of peace and happiness shone on our country which began to enjoy constant peace and increasing progress under our hereditary monarchs. In particular, we have witnessed economic progress and development beyond anyone's expectation over the past 26 years of His Majesty the King's reign. As the fruits of these achievements are being enjoyed by everyone today there is no need to elaborate any further on this.

He reminded the members that His Majesty the King has been constantly devolving power to the people through his policy of decentralization which has resulted in the establishment of District Development Committees and Block Development Committees in all the Dzongkhags. Furthermore, His Majesty has now empowered the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers and given full executive power to the Council of Ministers. The Chimi said that he had always been astounded by the changes introduced by His Majesty, but he never dreamt that a day would come when the National Assembly members may be called upon to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

He recalled that during the 71st Session of the National Assembly, the members had insisted on submitting a Genja of allegiance to His Majesty the King, like the Genja submitted to the first Druk Gyalpo, but His Majesty had refused to accept it. Nevertheless, the resolution on this issue clearly recorded the fact that the people of Bhutan have unwavering faith, loyalty and support for the cherished system of hereditary monarchy.

To introduce a system of registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo is to imitate a practice followed in other countries which are known as democracies. Although the term democracy is not widely used in our country, under our system of government the people enjoy more rights and benefits than in any democratic country.

As everyone is aware, countries which have changed from a monarchical system to a democratic system have witnessed endless upheavals and frequent changes of government. The lack of a stable government has invariably harmed the socio-economic progress of these countries.

He said that Bhutan has no reason to envy or imitate such systems and practices. If the hon'ble members decide on a mechanism to register a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo, there is every possibility that the ordinary people and general public of Bhutan will once again face the same hard times as our forefathers did. Instead, the hon'ble members should pray for the cherished system of hereditary monarchy to endure over

hundreds of Kelpas (aeons). The pure bond of loyalty and faith between the government and the people should not be blemished by such an undesirable practice. To prevent any dilution in the purity of this sacred bond it would be good Tendrel (auspicious fortune) if the hon'ble members of the National Assembly were to submit a Genja to reinforce the Genja submitted to the first Druk Gyalpo, and ensure that the question of a mechanism to register a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is never raised again in the National Assembly.

The Dagana Chimi submitted that upto now the people have experienced the most satisfactory level of peace and development due to the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. Why should any confidence motion be moved against a beloved King who has looked after the welfare of his people to such an extensive degree? This matter has become a very heavy weight on the minds of all the people. For the bond of faith and loyalty between the King and the people to grow ever stronger, the cherished system of hereditary monarchy must continue to govern the country. The establishment of a mechanism for a confidence vote is not at all useful and the hon'ble members should not agree to such a practice.

The Chimi of Dorokha in Samtse Dzongkhag submitted that at a time when the people have been enjoying the benefits of development and peace under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King, the third directive in the royal Kasho that the National Assembly should decide on a mechanism to move a confidence vote has made them feel extremely sad. He pleaded with folded hands, in the interest of future generations, that such a system should never be introduced. The people have unwavering loyalty and faith in His Majesty the King and do not want any such changes in the system to take place, he said.

The Chimi of Chhume geog in Bumthang Dzongkhag submitted that the members had thought deeply about the directive on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. Having reflected on it night and day, he said that it is their wish and prayer that a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo will never be required till the end of time. Recalling the Genja of allegiance pledged to the first Druk Gyalpo in 1907, he pointed out that ever since Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck ascended the golden throne, the people of Bhutan have been blessed with peace and happiness because of the exceptional wisdom of our Kings who are true embodiments of enlightened beings. Rather than a vote of confidence the members wished to submit, on behalf of the people, a pledge of allegiance to reinforce the Genja submitted by the Bhutanese people in 1907.

The Sarpang Dzongda appealed on behalf of all the members that the very idea of devising a mechanism for moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is inconceivable. He had listened to the views of the hon'ble members, to those who had come to watch the proceedings and to many other people. He had heard the people say that if the hon'ble members decided on a mechanism for a confidence motion, they should leave the hall and let the people take their place to plead against the introduction of such a system, directly to His Majesty the King. He said that for the people of Bhutan His Majesty is both the Sun and the Moon, the parent to whom they owe everything and the ultimate refuge of the country. That is why the people cannot bear the very thought of a confidence motion and all the members, fully sharing this genuine concern, wish to appeal to His Majesty the King that such a decision should not be passed.

The Samtse Dzongda pointed out that Bhutan is a country of the Dharma ruled by hereditary monarchs. As such, no matter how much the people thought over the matter, they just cannot see any need to have a system of registering a confidence vote in the King. His Majesty has already empowered the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers and given full executive powers to the Council of Ministers. Despite repeated pleas by the members, His Majesty has refused to retain the chairmanship of the Cabinet. Having to decide now on a mechanism to move a confidence motion in His Majesty the King is something that we just cannot bear to even think about.

If there should be any confidence motion at all, he felt that it should be moved against the ministers every two or three years.

The Chimi of Mewang, Genye, and Dagala geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that the discussion about the vote of confidence in the King has brought pain to the people as intense as a poisoned arrow piercing their hearts. Such a practice which will be an imitation of other countries is like children moving a vote of confidence on their parents to whom they owe everything, a disciple voting on the Lama in whom he has taken refuge and a student casting a vote against the teacher who has given him knowledge. Such a practice is neither commendable nor easy to live with. One must know on which part of the bed one should rest the head and where the feet should be placed. His Majesty has restored what has declined and reinforced what is in good condition. As such, the people are completely satisfied with everything that His Majesty has done and whatever He will undertake in the future. As the saying goes "the Lama teaches the Dharma, the king rules the country," the people are fully satisfied with the way His Majesty has been ruling the country.

Under His Majesty's wise leadership, Bhutan has achieved unprecedented progress within a short span of time and its relations with other countries have been strengthened and consolidated. At a time when everything in the country is going well, if a system of moving a confidence vote in the King is introduced it will lead to instability, and affect the peace and progress of the country. Introducing such a system will not be a case of "the journey being delayed because the wrong path was taken" but "the country being affected because the wrong policy is followed," and the greatest losers will be the Bhutanese people.

The hon'ble members must keep in mind the saying, "the wise man thinks before he acts, the fool regrets after the deed is done," and think very carefully on this matter and ensure that a system of registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is not endorsed. Although such a system may be good if it can be implemented properly, with everyone concerned keeping only the interest of the country in mind, it will be too late for regrets when it results in problems and undermines the peace and stability of the country. As the saying goes "it is easy to criticise others but difficult when one faces the same situation," it may be easy to imitate a system practised by others but difficult to apply it in our situation. Just as "every Lama has his teaching and every country has its own custom," we have our own system. While it is good to respect the systems and customs of other countries, it is extremely important that we cherish and uphold the unique system and customs we have in our own country.

He said that the discussion on the confidence vote reminded him of Jetsuen Milarepa's comment on "the parents being turned out of the house when the bride is brought in by their son." At this rate of devolution of powers to the people, a time might come when children may want to decide whether they want their parents or not. Bhutan is a country where the Dharma of Lord Buddha has flourished, and its customs and policies are derived from the wishes and aspirations of the people. If we are to imitate the customs and systems of other countries, the time will come when the strong and stable system of government which we have today will be undermined and the peace and progress enjoyed by the people will be affected. The very concept of a vote of confidence is unacceptable to the people and we appeal to His Majesty to accept our pleas against introducing such a system. As the saying goes, "although the direction of the raised sword is towards the sky, when it strikes it comes towards the ground," a confidence vote in the King will only result in hardship for the people.

The Chimi pointed out that as the country develops further, people will become better educated and more prosperous than each other. Experts and outstanding personalities will emerge but vested interests, jealousies and greed will also be on the rise. The wealthy and the influential will collude together, joined by the cunning and the obsequious, resulting in problems and difficulties for the country which will ultimately affect the ordinary people at large. In His Majesty the King, the people, today, have a leader who is impartial like the Sun and the Moon and can be trusted to redress any wrong-doings from any quarter and to whom they can appeal any time they face a problem. Without a ruler like His Majesty the King, the problems and grievances of the people will not be attended to with the same care and attention. Even cases involving capital crimes like murder may elicit a casual response that the matter will be looked into, with no follow-up taking place. Therefore, we must continue with the existing system we have, keeping in mind the saying, “blessings may be sought from the Lama but justice comes from the King.”

Since our forefathers installed Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck on the golden throne with their full faith and trust involving body, speech and mind, our country has enjoyed peace and happiness. As everyone knows, we are enjoying unprecedented peace and progress today. Therefore, instead of a system to move a confidence vote, we should look for ways, in keeping with good Tendrel, to further consolidate and perpetuate the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. He requested that the discussion on the vote of confidence should be discontinued.

The Tsirang Chimi said that while he was very happy to receive His Majesty the King’s Kasho, and he supported the election of cabinet ministers for five-year terms, he felt a deep anguish that His Majesty was proposing the registering of a confidence vote in the King in the National Assembly. The extent to which the people are enjoying peace and prosperity, and the fulfillment of many national objectives during the past twenty six years of His Majesty’s reign are well known to everyone. The people acknowledge the gratitude they owe His Majesty for all these achievements which are recognized even by foreigners who also appreciate the wise leadership provided by His Majesty.

We have endorsed the election of cabinet ministers, as required by the Kasho, but the thought of a vote of confidence brings such sadness that it is difficult to even speak and express one’s feelings. The Tsirang Chimi pleaded that a system for moving a vote of confidence in the King should not be introduced.

The Chimi of Shongphu Geog in Trashigang Dzongkhag said that all the members are deeply saddened by the directive in the royal Kasho for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo is not only the direct descendent of Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck but is also like a true incarnation of Guru Rimpoche. From the day His Majesty ascended the golden throne, the sun of peace and happiness has been shining all over Bhutan and it is because of His Majesty that our country has achieved such amazing socio-economic development. Therefore, we should end this discussion on a vote of confidence and instead, offer a pledge of allegiance to reinforce the Genja submitted to our first King, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck. The Chimi concluded his intervention by expressing his hope and prayer that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy will flourish for as long as the waters keep flowing in the rivers.

The Chimi of Shaba Geog in Paro Dzongkhag pointed out that registering votes of confidence is a practice of other countries which we do not need at all in Bhutan. We have many unique and commendable customs in our country such as the love for our national dress. Instead of imitating others by introducing a mechanism for a vote of confidence, we should submit a pledge of allegiance like the one that the people of Bhutan submitted to our first King when he was enthroned. Such a pledge was not only proposed very strongly for submission during the 71st Session of the National Assembly, but the people have also been repeatedly pointing out that, given the changing times, reiterating the pledge of allegiance is necessary to ensure that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy will continue to flourish for all time to come. Therefore, the National Assembly should decide that every household in the country should be given the opportunity to submit a signed pledge of allegiance to the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, according to their own faith and loyalty.

The Chimi of Samkhar Geog in Trashigang Dzongkhag reminded the Assembly that the Clergy, officials and the people had submitted a pledge of allegiance to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck when they requested him to become the first Druk Gyalpo. He suggested that the members of the National Assembly should submit a Genja, on behalf of the people of Bhutan, to reinforce the Genja submitted in 1907 as a step to ensure that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy will flourish till the end of time. As a Tendrel to ensure that Bhutan will continue to be ruled by successive Druk Gyalpos, we should decide against introducing any mechanism for a vote of confidence, he said.

The Chimi of Khar and Dungme geogs in Pemagatshel Dzongkhag thanked His Majesty the King for the royal Kasho which had been issued, keeping in mind the present and long term interest of the country and its continued well-being and security as a sovereign, independent country. Although every word and command of His Majesty must be honoured and fulfilled, establishing a mechanism to move a vote of confidence and further discussion on it is a matter which is impossible for the people to endure and accept, and a source of grave concern to the members. Today the country is progressing well on the path of development and the sun of peace and happiness is shining with His Majesty the King providing wise leadership, overcoming oppositions with good strategy and managing friends with affection. Therefore, there is neither the need for any form of confidence motion nor the wish for the matter to be discussed any further. Our country is very small and wedged between two giant neighbours in the north and the south. History tells us how our first King, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck has led our country and made it forever safe from foreign aggressions, ensuring that sons can live on the land of their fathers. As such, a system of moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo must never be introduced.

At this point, the Speaker urged the Assembly members to keep in mind, without any misunderstanding or misconception, that the reasons for having a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the King have been clearly explained in the royal Kasho. As the members are all aware, the changes enunciated in the Kasho are being introduced with a view to further strengthen the sovereignty and security of the country and ensure the well-being of the people. Reminding them that “the command of the King is heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold,” the Speaker asked the members to keep in mind the contents of the royal Kasho and ensure that the results of their deliberation are not inconsistent with its directive on the point under discussion.

The Chimi of Chang and Kawang geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that the King’s command is like the waters of a river flowing down from the mountains whose flow cannot be reversed. However, they were deeply disturbed by the proposed mechanism for registering a confidence vote in the King and they had no option but to express their views frankly. Bhutan has had four Kings since the establishment of hereditary monarchy and the reign of His Majesty the King has been the most glorious. His Majesty has always placed the interest of the people above his own, as a result of which the people are enjoying the fruits of unprecedented development and progress together with peace and happiness. The people are also taking active part in the decision

making process with the establishment of District Development Committees and Block Development Committees. After all these benefits, the very idea of moving a vote of confidence in our beloved King, to whom we are more indebted than to our own parents, is something we cannot even bear to think about and it should not even be discussed. The Genja submitted to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, which the hon'ble members have been referring to, was not pledged by a few individuals but by all the people of Bhutan because they had unanimously elected him as the first hereditary monarch to rule and guide the country. It was duly signed and sealed by the Clergy, the Ponlops of different regions, government officials and the people of the different Dzongkhags. If a decision is taken by the 76th Session on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo, it will be a source of deep concern for the Bhutanese people. Besides undermining the Genja submitted to the first Druk Gyalpo that hereditary monarchy shall rule Bhutan in perpetuity, it may also become more difficult, as time goes by, for sons to continue living on the land of their fathers if a system of moving a confidence vote in the King is introduced. The existing system of government which is so responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people will be seriously undermined. Since we have the same responsibilities as our forefathers, and must think of the interest of our future generations, we have no alternative but to appeal to His Majesty the King to rescind His directive on the mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

It is not possible for all the people in the country to come into the Assembly Hall to appeal to His Majesty against the introduction of a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. However, since the members of the National Assembly are their trusted representatives, he expressed his hope that His Majesty will accept their appeals on behalf of the people.

The Chimi pleaded that His Majesty should not consider incorporating an alien practice into our system. If we imitate outside practices like confidence motions, we will expose our country to serious problems, such as frequent changes in government resulting in political instability which is very common in other countries. We are all aware that in other countries there have been many impediments to good governance such as corruption. We should take note of the difficult situations and problems faced by neighbouring countries and strive to preserve and strengthen our own system of government. As the saying goes, "it is not the times that change but the people who change." The paddy continues to ripen and is harvested around the same time today as it has for centuries, but the changes in the thinking and attitude of the people can seriously

undermine the rich and noble heritage passed down to us by our forefathers and the eminent luminaries of the past.

The Chimi noted that some of the hon'ble members had called for a new Genja to be submitted to reinforce the one submitted to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck. Although the genuine concerns reflected in this suggestion are very obvious, on deeper reflection there is really no need to "drill fresh holes in old planks." Rather than submitting a Genja to each and every King, it is much more important to honour the historic Genja which is still valid today. Honouring the historic Genja of 1907 and upholding it will be equally effective in revitalizing the loyalty of the people and sustaining the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. He requested the house to decide that there is no need for a mechanism to register a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Sarpang Chimi noted that Bhutan has enjoyed peace and happiness along with tremendous socio-economic development since the establishment of hereditary monarchy in 1907. While enjoying such progress and prosperity, the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan in 1990 resulted in the destruction of development infrastructure and service facilities as well as loss of lives and property. Subsequently, the people of southern Bhutan submitted a Genja pledging unwavering allegiance to His Majesty the King during the 71st Session of the National Assembly. As already submitted by other members, there is no need to have a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the King. Instead of discussing this issue any further, the members should take a decision to submit a Genja to reinforce the one submitted to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, as a token of the people's confidence in the cherished system of hereditary monarchy.

The Lhuentse Chimi submitted that the pain he felt in his heart over the discussion on a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is like the pain from the pouring of boiling oil. Bhutan is a country of the Dharma with a cherished system of hereditary monarchy. Everyone is well aware of the extent to which the country has progressed today. On behalf of the people of the 202 geogs of 20 Dzongkhags, the members of the National Assembly appeal to His Majesty the King against introducing a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. The people are prepared to submit a new Genja to reinforce the one submitted to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuk. There is no need to imitate other countries and introduce a system of registering a confidence motion in the King in our country where the values of the Dharma flourish.

Sometime back, when His Majesty announced in the 71st Session that He would abdicate if He did not succeed in resolving the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan, tears had welled up in the eyes of the hon'ble members. The Chimi said he was not speaking just for the sake of speaking but sincerely explaining the deep respect and unwavering loyalty that the people of Bhutan have for His Majesty the King. Therefore, a system for moving a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo should never be introduced in our country.

The Chimi of Lamidara in Tsirang Dzongkhag noted that an extended discussion had taken place on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the King, a system which had never existed in Bhutan. In keeping with the Kasho issued by His Majesty the King to devolve even greater power to the people, the National Assembly has elected cabinet ministers through secret ballot. However, since nobody wants to have a mechanism to move a vote of confidence, we hope that His Majesty the King will accept the prayers of the Assembly members to dispense with introducing such a system. He requested the Speaker to also conclude the discussion on this note.

The Chimi of Samar and Sombey geogs in Haa Dzongkhag said that, as submitted by other members, our forefathers and the eminent luminaries of the past had already submitted a more than adequate Genja that established the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. He did not see any reason to discuss the question of a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. At the most, in keeping with changing times, the house should submit a new Genja to reinforce the one submitted to the first Druk Gyalpo. He pointed out that although the system of government in Bhutan may be monarchical in form, in practice Bhutan is a country where the true values of human rights are fully respected and the people enjoy peace and individual security.

He said that all the people pleaded against the introduction of a vote of confidence in their King. As the saying goes, “bad ways should be rejected even if taught by parents, good practices should be adopted even if they belong to enemies,” the vote of confidence is a practice that did not exist before and should not be incorporated in our system. Just as “the son should carry on after the father,” our Kings should continue to rule our country and bless us with the perpetuation of our cherished system of hereditary monarchy. He said that for their part, the people will always remain constant in their loyalty and respect for His Majesty the King and it is their prayer that His Majesty will have a long and glorious reign, and that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy will flourish for all time to come. Therefore, the house should resolve that there will never be a need to move a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

Before the establishment of hereditary monarchy, the Bhutanese people faced great hardships and problems in their daily lives. Since then our country has enjoyed peace and stability and achieved tremendous socio-economic progress, as many members have pointed out. Had it not been for the wise leadership of our monarchs it is difficult to say what would have become of our small country which is sandwiched between two of the most powerful countries in the world. Our cherished system of hereditary monarchy is both the outer protective fence and the inner jewel of our country. Those who are not familiar with Bhutan are under the wrong impression that because Bhutan is a monarchy our people do not enjoy political freedom or human rights.

He pointed out that the very idea of a vote of confidence could indicate a lack of trust between the government and the people. The introduction of such a system holds the risk of creating misunderstanding between the people, who have always been well governed, and the government which has always been appreciated and respected.

The Chimi pointed out that the decision making process has been constantly decentralized over the years with the establishment of the National Assembly, Royal Advisory Council, District Development Committees and Block Development Committees. All these moves in devolving power to the people were initiated from the Throne for the benefit of the country. They were not responses to demands from the people as in other countries. Now, during the 76th Session, His Majesty the King has empowered the National Assembly to elect cabinet ministers and granted full executive power to the Council of Ministers. Therefore, the National Assembly should pass a resolution that will forever disallow any move to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Dagapela Chimi submitted that the members have read the Kasho issued by His Majesty the King and also understood its contents. Extensive deliberation had been carried out and in accordance with one of the directives in the Kasho, the Assembly had also elected new cabinet ministers through secret ballot.

However, the directive on a mechanism for a vote of confidence in the King is most astounding and has deeply disturbed all the members. The devotion of the people to His Majesty is deep and heartfelt and they wish to strongly re-affirm their complete faith and loyalty in the monarchy which they pray that their children, and all future generations, will have the privilege of upholding and thereby enjoy peace and harmony. He said that it will be most unbecoming of the Assembly members to decide on a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the King as it is a practice which is not at all desirable for our country.

The Chimi of Lango Geog in Paro Dzongkhag said that he also wished to make a submission on the question of a mechanism for registering a confidence vote, even though many other members had made clear elucidations on the matter. He reminded the house that in the past when the Bhutanese people faced great difficulties and hardship, and when the country was facing a serious threat to its peace and stability both from within and without, it was Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck who risked his life to overcome these problems. As a result, it is possible today for “sons to live on the land of their fathers” in complete freedom. Bhutan has enjoyed good governance throughout the reigns of all our Kings and achieved unprecedented progress and prosperity within a short span of time. If the country is to enjoy further progress and prosperity in the years ahead it is important that the bonds of loyalty, faith and trust between the people and the government remain as strong as ever and the system of hereditary monarchy continues to flourish. Therefore, to ensure that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy flourishes for centuries to come, and also for the sake of Tendrel which is very important in our custom, the members wish to appeal to His Majesty the King to accept our pleas that the mechanism to move a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo should never be introduced.

The Chimis of Mongar, Zhemgang, Samdrupjongkhar and Wangdue Phodrang also submitted their views. Before Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck ascended the golden throne as the first hereditary monarch, Bhutan was ruled by a succession of Desis. It was during the rule of the Desis that Bhutan lost large tracts of its land in the Duars to the British. Once hereditary monarchy was established, the unity and equality among the people was nurtured and strengthened and the country could embark on the path of development. Today, along with the fruits of our development efforts the people are enjoying the sunshine of peace and happiness. The National Assembly simply cannot have a reason to ever move a vote of confidence against such a succession of Kings to whom the people and the country owe so much. Chimi after Chimi expressed their views that they did not want a vote of confidence to be instituted and wished to uphold the existing system.

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King called upon the members to take a broad and farsighted view of the issues under discussion. His Majesty assured the members that He had contemplated very deeply on the changes proposed in the Kasho over many years, and all the changes were proposed keeping in mind the interest of the country and the well-being of the people. The third provision in the Kasho which requires the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo was incorporated because it will be beneficial for the achievement of

several important objectives which will have deep significance on the present and future well-being of the people and the country. If these objectives are not achieved today by His Majesty it will not be possible to achieve them in the future. Disclosing all the reasons will not be beneficial for the realisation of these important objectives, but it should be understood that in the course of achieving them feelings and sentiments would be hurt.

His Majesty reminded the members that Bhutan is a very small country with a very small population. Therefore, the important objectives of the Palden Drukpa must be achieved without compromising the sovereignty and security of the country. It is also very important that besides strengthening and safeguarding the sovereignty and security of the country, all the problems facing Bhutan are solved according to the aspirations and expectations of the people. It will be a difficult task and there will be many risks and problems in overcoming these challenges.

His Majesty assured the members that He would take on the full responsibility of achieving these important goals to ensure the security and sovereignty of the country and the well-being and prosperity of the people. Throughout His life, His Majesty had always placed the fulfillment of the national interest above all other objectives. Pointing out that the interest of the nation is far more important than the interest of one individual, His Majesty called upon the National Assembly members to keep in mind the national interest and endorse the proposal for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Chimi of Lingbu, Shelngana, Bemed and Zomey geogs in Punakha Dzongkhag submitted that although he read the royal Kasho over and over again and reflected very deeply on its contents, he just could not bring himself to accept the concept of registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. Devising a mechanism to register a vote of confidence is a responsibility that cannot be shouldered by the people, and since the hon'ble members will also not be able to carry such a heavy responsibility, the incorporation of such a practice should not even be contemplated. He said that it will not be possible for any of the Chimis to go back to their constituencies and tell the people that they have endorsed a system for moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Chimi recalled that His Majesty the Third Druk Gyalpo had established the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council although the people had never requested for these institutions to be established. His Majesty the present Druk Gyalpo initiated the

decentralisation policy and established District Development Committees and Block Development Committees, again without any request being made by the people. Now, during the 76th Session, His Majesty has empowered the National Assembly to elect the cabinet ministers, something which the people had never even thought about. The directive in the royal Kasho for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo is a devolution of power that the people cannot even contemplate.

His Majesty the King has always promoted the welfare of the people and safeguarded the security of the country for which the people are deeply grateful. In several past sessions of the National Assembly, the Chimis have pledged the total loyalty of the people of the 20 Dzongkhags to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. If the hon'ble members endorse the proposal for a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo, the resolution of these past sessions will be rendered meaningless. As elected representatives of the people, they cannot even bear to think of facing the people of their constituencies if they have to inform them about endorsing the proposal on the vote of confidence.

The Chimi pointed out that Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck had ascended the golden throne because the Clergy, officials and the people of Bhutan had all requested him to become the first hereditary Druk Gyalpo, and not because He had seized power and proclaimed himself King. The institution of hereditary monarchy was established by our forefathers for the well-being of future generations and the security of the country. If the National Assembly endorses a mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo, we would be creating a bad Tendrel. The Chimi, therefore, expressed his hope and prayer that His Majesty the King will listen to his pleas and not introduce this practice.

He pointed out that since it will be the National Assembly that would move a vote of confidence if the practice is endorsed, the repeated pleas by all the members not to introduce this practice is in effect a vote of confidence in His Majesty the King, and the issue should be closed. If a mechanism for a vote of confidence is endorsed, it will be like celebrating a Tendrel for changing Bhutan from a country where the welfare of the people is ensured into a country which will be affected by the vagaries of democracy. As a traditional saying goes, "Tibet is steeped in religion, India is advanced in technology and Bhutan places importance on Tendrel," for the people of Bhutan, Tendrel is very important. The very thought that a two-thirds vote of no-confidence would require His Majesty the King to abdicate robs the Chimis of their sleep and removes the taste from their food. Since all the members of the National Assembly are unanimous in not wanting

to endorse any mechanism for a vote of confidence, the Chimi requested His Majesty to accept their pleas to this effect.

The Samdrupjongkhar Chimi pointed out that the people of Bhutan, in all walks of life, have been enjoying unparalleled peace and happiness because of the blessings of the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa, the farsighted leadership and extraordinary merits of our successive monarchs, and the good fortune of the people as a result of the good Tendrel of the existing system. Therefore, the people do not see any reason to introduce a system of registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Chimi of Bardo Geog in Zhemgang Dzongkhag recalled that in 1907, the monastic bodies, Ponlops, Dzongpons, and the people unanimously elected and installed Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan. A Genja was submitted by our forefathers that, henceforth, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck and his successors shall rule over Bhutan in perpetuity. Endorsing a mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo will not be in keeping with this Genja, and it will hurt the sentiments of the people and create alarm and confusion in their minds. He pointed out the peace, stability and prosperity that the country is enjoying today has all been due to the wise leadership of our Kings. He prayed that His Majesty will have a long and glorious reign and that Bhutan will be blessed with constant guidance from the golden throne for as long as the waters flow in the rivers.

The Samdrupjongkhar Dzongda submitted that the confidence vote will be a flagrant contradiction of the selfless concern that His Majesty the King has always shown for his people and country. He pointed out that His Majesty, with complete disregard for His own safety, frequently visited the disturbed areas in the south in times of trouble almost immediately after the most serious and threatening incidents. He recalled that in 1991 His Majesty personally visited the site where the ngolop terrorists murdered three Forest Guards in Daifam.

In August 1997, when Bodo militants attacked the Forestry Office and the Police Station in Nganglam at 6 a.m. in the morning killing four policemen, His Majesty arrived on the site at 1 p.m. in the afternoon on the same day. All the hon'ble members are aware that His Majesty the King, out of deep concern and commitment to the interest of the country, overlooking the physical hardships and even the risks to His life, has time and again personally visited many high security risks areas. Likewise, His Majesty had incorporated the third directive of the Kasho with a view to ensure the present well-being and future

security of our country of the Palden Drukpa, so that the Bhutanese people can always live in peace and happiness on the land of their forefathers.

He pointed out that in other countries there is frequent internal strife and turmoil due to struggles for political power. In Bhutan His Majesty the King has been constantly decentralizing the decision making process and devolving His power to the people. His Majesty is a rare and selfless leader, born of a noble lineage as a fulfillment of the merits accumulated by the Bhutanese people. Therefore, all the members are deeply concerned about endorsing a mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo because they will not be able to face the people or justify the decision taken by them.

The Dzongda pointed out that, although all the Chimis are elected by the people, they have to consider whether they have the mandate to arrive at such a grave decision without consulting the people. He suggested that this matter of the confidence vote should not be decided in the current session. It should be deferred for the time being so that it can be discussed with the people and only then submitted through the Block Development Committees and District Development Committees for deliberation in the next session of the National Assembly.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Goem Dorji acknowledged that the command of His Majesty the King is “heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold.” However, he pleaded from the bottom of his heart that the proposal for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo should not be endorsed. He expressed his hope that His Majesty the King will listen to the prayers of the members who are all against introducing such a practice.

He felt that it is not at all necessary to imitate the practices and systems of other countries. Until now there had never been any dilution of the strong bond of loyalty, trust and devotion between the Bhutanese people and their beloved Kings. It is to maintain the purity of this bond that repeated pleas against the endorsement of a confidence vote were being submitted by the Assembly members. He hoped that His Majesty would relent to the repeated submissions.

The Mongar Chimi said that he fully appreciated the fact that the royal directive on registering a confidence vote was issued with the interest of the people and the country in mind, and that it is also in keeping with the times. He also realised that it is not proper to question a royal command. Nevertheless, as the saying goes, “the attire must conform to

the place, the food must conform to the taste and the teachings must suit the mind,” it is not at all necessary to introduce a vote of confidence in a revered leader just to conform to the systems of other countries. Devolving all the power to the people at this rate could result in the fruits of labour by those who are dedicated to their country being squandered later by the undeserving.

Under the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, our country, where the Dharma of Lord Buddha flourishes, has achieved tremendous progress and prosperity with the people enjoying peace and happiness. At the same time, His Majesty the King has preserved our rich cultural heritage and strengthened the security and sovereignty of our country.

He submitted that the people have always appreciated the impartial manner in which His Majesty has looked after the welfare of His people irrespective of which parts of the country they belong to. As the saying goes, His Majesty truly does not “see differently through the left or the right eye.” Introducing a mechanism for registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo could one day result in the ordinary people of Bhutan being deprived of a caring parent and rendered into orphans. Such a practice must never be introduced. Instead, we must maintain and promote our rich tradition and ensure that the cherished system of hereditary monarchy will flourish for generations to come in keeping with our Tendrel.

The Trashigang Dzongda thanked His Majesty the King for explaining that the royal directive to the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo had been issued because such a mechanism will be beneficial for fulfilling certain objectives that will have a deep significance for the national interest of the country and the well-being of the people.

He said that, never having had to confront a situation where such a practice had to be considered, it is indeed disconcerting to have to think that a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is essential for realising some important national objectives. His Majesty is not just a King but an object of veneration. He said that, as a representative of His Majesty and the government in the Dzongkhags for many years, in the course of his interactions with the people, he had been amazed by the immense faith, trust and loyalty the people have for His Majesty. He had seen thousands of old people come, with walking sticks in hand, from far-flung villages to see His Majesty, believing that if they do not see Him even once in their lifetime they will not die content. During the Plan

meetings and the National Day Celebrations, people take home the left overs of the public lunch served by His Majesty so that they can give it to their children, believing that the food is sacred.

His Majesty fulfilled three roles for the Bhutanese people; as a Lam, as a King, and a parent. When a Lam preaches, the disciples do not question the authenticity of his teachings. Likewise, the command of a King is never questioned nor the obligation of the children to their parents for the unconditional love they have received. Such is the noble tradition that is respected by all Bhutanese.

Therefore, there is no need to devise a mechanism to register any form of confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. At a time when the country is enjoying unparalleled peace, progress and happiness, it brings an infinite sense of sorrow just to hear any mention of a confidence motion in the Druk Gyalpo. It should be remembered that it is not the times that change but the thinking of the people. Just as “every Lama has his own teachings, and every King his policies,” what we need to do is honour and maintain the cherished traditions and system we have in our country instead of discussing about registering confidence motions. The people have been greatly alarmed and deeply disturbed by all this talk about a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. In order to reassure them and to further strengthen the cherished system of government that we have in Bhutan, the 76th Session of the National Assembly should decide to add a new clause to strengthen the Genja submitted by the Bhutanese people to the first Druk Gyalpo in 1907.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering said that every member of the National Assembly, and the observers both within and outside the Assembly hall, felt that the mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo is absolutely unnecessary.

He said that His Majesty had explained very clearly the need for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence. The clarity of His Majesty’s explanation is like ‘the vision of the fish which is even clearer than the crystal clear water in which it lives.’ Although it is inconceivable for the members to question His Majesty’s command, they have pleaded repeatedly in the hope that their pleas will have a bearing on His Majesty’s decision. Just as ‘a horde of frogs can kill a tiger through sheer numbers,’ he hoped that their insistent requests to His Majesty will make Him relent and change the decision on instituting a mechanism for a confidence vote.

The Councillor recalled that our forefathers had unanimously elected Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck as the first Druk Gyalpo and they had submitted a Genja pledging the full and perpetual support of the Bhutanese people to the system of hereditary monarchy. He called upon the members to re-endorse this historic Genja and pledge their total loyalty and faith in His Majesty the King. He said that the members must decide against introducing any mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo, although the royal directive was issued to ensure the well-being and security of the country. Expressing his deep anguish, he emphasized that the introduction of a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo will be detrimental to the future stability and security of the country. It is an alien practice which is unsuitable for Bhutan. Just as 'every Lama has his own teachings, and every country has its own customs,' it is important that we safeguard our own traditions and customs. The introduction of a confidence vote will undermine our cherished values and institutions, he said.

The Samtse Chimi, expressing his views on the third directive of the royal Kasho, said that before Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck acceded to the golden throne as the first hereditary King of Bhutan, people were always anxious about the security of the country. It was for this reason that hereditary monarchy was established. Since then, Bhutan has been ruled by four successive Kings. He pointed out that under the benevolent and wise rule of His Majesty the present Druk Gyalpo, our country has enjoyed even greater peace and prosperity. There is, therefore, no need at all to introduce a mechanism for a confidence vote. Instead, we should continue to follow our existing system for all time to come.

Intervening in the deliberations, the Speaker pointed out that the need for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo had been given very clearly in His Majesty's Kasho. In the course of the discussions, His Majesty had also explained very clearly the importance of endorsing the proposal for instituting a mechanism for a confidence vote for the well-being of the people and the country. The three proposals in the Kasho had not been drawn up recently. They had been seriously contemplated by His Majesty over many years. His Majesty had also emphasized the importance of strengthening the sovereignty and security of the nation and ensuring the long term well-being of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people. His Majesty had assured the National Assembly that He will bear the full responsibility of strengthening the sovereignty and security of the nation and ensuring the well-being of the country. His Majesty had further

explained that there are certain national objectives to be achieved and that if these goals are not fulfilled today it will not be possible to fulfill them in the future.

The Speaker reminded the members that throughout the past 26 years of His reign, His Majesty had selflessly dedicated himself to the service of the country without any concern for His personal interest or security. Through his farsighted leadership, His Majesty had brought unprecedented peace and prosperity to the Bhutanese nation and people for which the members had also expressed their deep gratitude. The hon'ble members, like every other Bhutanese citizen, should place their full faith in His Majesty the King and support His wishes.

The Speaker pointed out that the proposal in the royal Kasho is not to hold a vote of confidence in the 76th Session itself but for this session to endorse a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence.

The Speaker reminded the members that His Majesty had explained that in the course of fulfilling some of the important national objectives, sentiments and feelings in various quarters would be hurt, and that it would be very beneficial for the country if the 76th Session endorsed the proposal for establishing a mechanism for registering a confidence vote. His Majesty had given considerable thought, over many years, before making these proposals. Therefore, the hon'ble members should place their full faith in His Majesty the King and endorse His Majesty's proposal for a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Zhemang Dzongda said that the most important thing for every Bhutanese to bear in mind is to protect the security of the country and cherish our system of hereditary monarchy. Moving a confidence motion will be like children trying to wrest the family property from their parents. It will also be a most ungrateful display of ingratitude to our Kings who have done so much for the country and given Bhutan such a good name. It is our Kings who have safeguarded and strengthened the security and sovereignty of our country and made it possible for the Bhutanese people to enjoy peace and happiness. In order for the country to continue enjoying peace, prosperity and stability, such a practice like registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo must never be introduced.

The Pemagatshel Dzongda also submitted that there is no need at all, at this juncture, to devise a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. The people

have complete trust and faith in His Majesty and know that He will continue to look after their well-being and Kidu as He has always done all these past years. As such, there will never be any need or occasion to cast a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo. He pointed out that it is not even necessary to look as far back as 40 or 50 years to see the incredible achievements in the country's socio-economic development. The remarkable progress that has taken place over the last ten to fifteen years alone is clearly visible for everyone to see. As there is a general consensus among the hon'ble members that a vote of confidence should never be instituted, he requested the Speaker to conclude the discussion with a resolution to this effect.

Intervening in the deliberation at this point, the Speaker said that the concerns and reservations expressed by the members on this issue are genuine. However, it is the command of His Majesty the King that a mechanism for a vote of confidence be introduced. He said that His Majesty's directive does not indicate any doubts about the faith and loyalty of the people. His Majesty has issued this proposal for the present and future well-being and security of the country. If a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo will benefit the future well-being of the country and the Bhutanese people, it should be sufficient reason for the hon'ble members to cast aside their concerns and reservations on the proposal. The Speaker recommended that the hon'ble members should reach a consensus and endorse this proposal enunciated in the royal Kasho .

The Bumthang Dzongda noted that according to the third provision in the royal Kasho, His Majesty the King would abdicate if a vote of no-confidence is passed by a two-third majority in the Assembly. He said that this provision has caused unbearable anguish among the people. It is all due to His Majesty the King that the sun of happiness and the moon of peace have been shining over the country all these years. The debt of gratitude which the Bhutanese people owe to His Majesty is so great that we will not be able to repay it even in our next lifetime. He pointed out that even outsiders have lauded His Majesty's noble achievements.

The Dzongda acknowledged that His Majesty had issued the Kasho after many years of deep contemplation on the best ways and means to ensure the well-being, peace and security of the country. However, if a mechanism for introducing a vote of confidence is set up it can be manipulated and misused by vested interests and outside influences. Such misuse and manipulation of the system can be kept at bay only for a few years at best. We

will not be able to guarantee or predict what kind of situation our country will face during our children's lifetime. That is why all the members have been appealing to His Majesty to accept our pleas that a system for registering a confidence vote should never be introduced.

The Chimi of Mewang, Genye and Dagala geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag said that the hon'ble members have been unanimous in their request to His Majesty that a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo should never be introduced. However, His Majesty the King has called upon the members to endorse this proposal as enunciated in the royal Kasho. Nevertheless, the Chimi submitted that, as advised by Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel himself that "every undertaking should be carried out after proper assessment," the National Assembly should also give deep consideration to this matter before coming to any decision. The Chimi expressed his confidence that no Bhutanese will ever cast a negative vote against His Majesty the King even if a mechanism for registering such a vote is instituted. Also, so long as the values of the Dharma are understood and appreciated and our rich traditions and culture are not diluted by outside customs, there should be no problems in our country just as the saying goes, "a father will not give poison to his son, the white cloud cannot be impure." However, it is necessary to keep in mind that with the passage of time we will have to guard against the problems faced by many other countries where people with no sense of loyalty, and driven by the compulsions of greed, have no hesitations in harming their country for personal gain, even at the risk of their lives.

He said that we should not simply follow the practices of other countries without considering the consequences. Just because the neighbour is drying and grinding his barley does not mean that we should also do the same. Adopting a new system without understanding the consequences might become like a case of a person who forgets his own mother tongue while failing to learn the foreign language he tried to adopt. Having abandoned the system which has always been good for us, we will lack understanding and experience of the alien one that has been adopted. In the process, the greatest losers will be the Bhutanese people.

His Majesty the King has been constantly decentralizing the decision making process which has been going on very smoothly all these years, and all devolution of power to the people has always been initiated from the Throne. Now, during the 76th Session, His Majesty has empowered the National Assembly to elect the cabinet ministers and this

responsibility has accordingly been carried out. Regarding the mechanism for registering a vote of confidence, there is no need to implement so many changes during this session, and therefore it should be left for discussion during the 77th Session. If we really need to adopt an alien practice it should be done gradually, instead of all at once, giving due consideration to Tendrel to which we have always attached much importance.

The Lhuentse Dzongda said that Bhutan is a country with a cherished system of hereditary monarchy, and where the Dharma is also followed. As such, the thinking of the people is in conformity with the Dharma. It is the good fortune of the Bhutanese people that, as a result of their collective merit, a noble and blessed personality like His Majesty the King has ascended to the golden throne.

All the members have appealed unanimously against instituting a vote of confidence and there should be no cause for concern or hesitation in making submissions on this account. His Majesty the King has enhanced peace and national unity in the country through his wise leadership which gives due recognition to the harmonious duality of our secular and temporal institutions.

If the Assembly endorses a mechanism for a vote of confidence it will be like mixing brass with gold. There is also a real danger of outside influences attempting to interfere in our internal affairs. It will also dilute and affect the deep bond of faith and loyalty between the Druk Gyalpo and his subjects. He clarified that his deep concern and anxiety compelled him to submit a plea that a system for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo should never be introduced. In any country it is considered necessary for the people to reach a consensus on all important national issues. The Dzongda pointed out that the very act of discussing a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo amounted to undermining the pure bond of faith, trust and loyalty between the people and His Majesty the King. A mechanism for moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is not at all desirable for the country, both for the present and for the future.

The Tshenyi Lupon of the Central Monastic Body pointed out that His Majesty the King is proposing the devolution of power to the extent that the people will have the authority to decide whether His Majesty himself should remain on the throne. He said that this was very disconcerting in a religious country and the monk body felt deep anguish. He pointed out that the source of peace and harmony in Bhutan has been its religion. Without religion there is no Buddha-Dharma and without the Buddha Dharma there is no peace and

harmony. Bhutan's monarchs have safeguarded both the spiritual and temporal needs of the country. Peace and prosperity have flourished in Bhutan because its monarchs have always promoted the Dharma.

He said that everyone is aware of the progress achieved during the reign of His Majesty the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. Together with modern economic development, Bhutan's religious institutions have also flourished. In the past there were just two Dratshangs in Punakha and Thimphu and four or five Rabdeys in other Dzongkhags. Since His Majesty ascended the golden throne, branches of the Dratshang have been established in all the Dzongkhags along with Sheydras, Drubdays and Gomdays. Unstinted support has been extended to all these religious institutions so that the teachings of Lord Buddha can reach all parts of the country like the rays of the sun rising from behind the mountain peaks. He said that the monk body appealed from the depth of their hearts to His Majesty against the introduction of a confidence vote. The Tshenyi Lupon pointed out that, in life, the debt of gratitude owed by children to their parents is great but what the disciple owes to his Lam for imparting the teachings of the Dharma is even greater. And the generous patron of the Dharma is the King. If the monk body endorses a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo we would be undermining our own benefactor. With the introduction of such a practice, the Dharma may decline along with the peace and happiness in the country.

He pointed out that the monk body, senior government officials and our forefathers had unanimously installed the first Druk Gyalpo on the golden throne and submitted a Genja pledging perpetual support to the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. This Genja was framed after considering the benefits it would have on the future peace, prosperity and stability of the country and duly submitted in the sacred Goenkhang at Punakha Dzong in the presence of the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa. Since then, due to the farsighted leadership of our monarchs, peace and happiness has flourished in our country. We should, therefore, continue to respect this historic Genja instead of thinking about a vote of confidence. As it should be possible to realise all important national objectives through various other means, it is not at all desirable to introduce a mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Thimphu Dzongda pointed out that all the members are aware of the wisdom and achievements of His Majesty the King and have full faith and confidence in Him. Moreover, as submitted by the hon'ble members, the Genja submitted to Gongsar Ugyen

Wangchuck in 1907 is even stronger than a vote of confidence. In the past sessions, the National Assembly has entrusted His Majesty the King with the full responsibility of achieving several important national objectives, thereby clearly confirming the total confidence that all the members have in His Majesty. Even foreigners have lauded the wise leadership and outstanding achievements of His Majesty the King. He also pointed out that all the new cabinet ministers had secured more than 90 percent of the votes cast, once again reflecting the confidence of the Assembly members in His Majesty the King. Therefore, there is absolutely no need to have a mechanism to move a vote of confidence in our Druk Gyalpo.

The Chimi of Tongzhang and Jamkhar geogs in Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that, under the wise and farsighted leadership of His Majesty the King, a wide network of development and service infrastructure had been established all across the country and the people enjoyed unprecedented peace and happiness. Even though the ngolops tried to disrupt this happy state of affairs they could not succeed in their objective of harming the country, and the people continue to enjoy peace and happiness. What the people want is peace, happiness and economic progress. As all the members are aware, these aspirations of the people have been amply fulfilled under the wise and farsighted leadership of our beloved Kings. Therefore, there is no reason at all to have any mechanism for registering a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji said that he was both impressed and gratified to hear the views expressed by the hon'ble members on the proposal for registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. As pointed out by many of the members, for the people of Bhutan, His Majesty the King is a trusted leader who is like the sun and the moon and a loving parent. Because of His Majesty's wise and benevolent leadership, the Bhutanese people have never had any occasion to feel like "lost chicks without the mother hen." In fact, His Majesty has brought unprecedented progress and prosperity to our country and made us able to stand on our own feet. After all this, if we introduce a system of moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo it might seriously affect the security and sovereignty of our country. He realized that His Majesty would have issued the royal Kasho only after considering the benefits it would have for the well-being of the country and the people. It should also be inconceivable for anyone to question a royal command. However, the deep and genuine concern that such a practice would lead to serious problems for the people and the country have compelled the members to express their doubts on this issue when it is under discussion. Otherwise, as

the saying goes, “when the calf dies, the cow is unable to help,” it will be too late for us to do anything when our people face problems in the future. He, therefore, appealed to His Majesty to overlook the presumption of the members in expressing their doubts on the royal directive for a mechanism to register a confidence vote.

His Majesty the King assured the members that the views and concerns expressed by the hon’ble members were fully appreciated by Him. Regarding the directive in the Kasho for the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo, the hon’ble members should not think that it was issued because His Majesty wished to test the love and loyalty of the people.

His Majesty reminded the members that the Kasho was issued because it will be beneficial for safeguarding the security and sovereignty of the country and ensuring the peace and happiness of the people. If the hon’ble members have full faith and confidence in His Majesty they should have no reason to be alarmed or have any doubt and hesitation in endorsing the Kasho fully.

The main point that the hon’ble members must consider very carefully is whether the individual interest of the King should be given more importance or whether ensuring the present well-being and future security and sovereignty of the country should be given greater precedence. With the deep bonds of faith, trust and loyalty between the King and the people remaining as pure as ever, introducing a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo can only have very positive benefits. If the National Assembly endorses this proposal it will indeed be very beneficial for promoting and safeguarding the interests of the people and the country.

Reminding the members that He had taken the full responsibility of achieving confidence vote remains a source of deep concern for all the members. Contrary to the saying, “do not introduce your son to a bad example,” he feared that instituting a confidence vote will expose Bhutan to an undesirable practice. He emphasised that the repeated submissions made by the members are not mere words but expressions of the genuine concern felt by all of them.

Despite the repeated pleas by all the members, His Majesty has once again explained that the directive on the confidence vote was issued because it will be beneficial for the present and future well-being and security of the country. Even so, there is no pleasure to be felt in contemplating a mechanism for a confidence vote. However, since there is

no alternative, the members have no choice but to agree to the proposal out of deep respect for His Majesty the King although it is with very heavy hearts that we do so, he said.

The Councillor reminded the members that the confidence vote should be looked upon as a ball of white wool which they have in their hands. The members have the choice of dyeing it with any colour they like. Keeping in mind the saying that “the command of the King is heavier than the mountains and more precious than gold,” if the proposal for a mechanism for a confidence vote is not endorsed, the members would be guilty of violating a royal command. I would, however, like to request the hon’ble Speaker that, from now on, registering of a confidence vote should never be included in the agenda for any session of the National Assembly, he said.

The Chimi of Chang and Kawang geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag admitted that the royal Kasho had directed the National Assembly to decide on a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo to further strengthen the system of government. Furthermore, His Majesty had personally reiterated this directive during the discussions. However, this command has caused deep concern in our minds and, although it is not proper to question a royal command, we have no alternative but to express our concerns now as it will be too late to do so later, he said.

The Chimi acknowledged that the Speaker had also explained that the directive on the confidence vote had been issued because it will be good for the present and future interest of the country. The members had, however, observed that in democracies which had such practices, peace and stability rarely exists. In Bhutan the people enjoy undisturbed peace and happiness with the government looking after their welfare. For instance, the Five-Year Plan development programmes in our country are not only based on the requests of the people but the government even incorporates activities which have not been asked for by the people. There is no other country like this in the world.

He said that the Chimis have been asked very strongly by the people to make every effort, at this initial stage itself, to ensure that registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo is not endorsed by the National Assembly because it will undermine the ideal state of affairs enjoyed by the country today.

He asked His Majesty to forgive the members for questioning a royal command but he felt that it will be better not to land up in a situation later like “the hapless blacksmith who

has to melt down the sword which he has himself forged.” Since this year is an inauspicious year, the Chimi appealed to His Majesty to defer the discussion on the confidence vote to the next session of the National Assembly.

The Sarpang Chimi pointed out that during the past 26 years of His Majesty’s reign, the fruits of the rapid socio-economic development that has been taking place in the country have “spread like the golden rays of the sun.” At such a time when the people of Bhutan are enjoying prosperity and happiness, the question of introducing a mechanism for a confidence vote has disturbed them very deeply, and the members could not bring themselves to endorse the proposal. He said that all the members deeply appreciated the benevolence of His Majesty the King and acknowledged that every action of His Majesty has been taken for the benefit and well-being of the people and the country. He expressed his fervent hope that Bhutan will continue to be ruled by His Majesty the King, as before, and pledged his full support to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. He submitted that there is no need at all to institute a mechanism for a confidence vote in a King who is so benevolent and fully committed to promoting the well-being and Kidu of all his people.

The Samtse Chimi said that during his tenure as a Chimi for the last six years he had never been so distressed as he is today during the 76th Session. He has been praying fervently to the Divine Deities to prevent the adoption of a confidence vote.

He explained that before the advent of hereditary monarchy in Bhutan, there was constant civil strife and problems. Since then the country has been enjoying peace, stability and prosperity under our hereditary monarchs. Therefore, it is not possible to even think of registering a confidence vote in the King who is the very source of peace and happiness in our country. The people will not accept such a change in the system as they cherish the existing system and wish to reaffirm their support for hereditary monarchy to flourish in our country for generations to come.

The Chhukha Chimi submitted that the members could not fully fathom His Majesty’s thoughts regarding the repeated pleas made by them that a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo should not be introduced. He said that there has never been a confidence vote since the establishment of hereditary monarchy and because of the wise leadership of our Kings, Bhutan has enjoyed peace and prosperity. He feared that introducing a practice for registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo could result in serious problems and difficulties for the country.

The Speaker reminded the members that, as they are all fully aware, in the past 26 years of His reign, His Majesty has always given priority to the interest of the country and the peace and happiness of the people. He pointed out that, in 1990, when His Majesty took upon himself the full responsibility of resolving the ngolop problem in the south, many people had expressed doubts and reservations. However, His Majesty worked day and night to ensure that the interests of the country and the people are fully safeguarded and the results are there for everyone to see. Likewise, His Majesty has proposed a mechanism for a confidence vote because it will be beneficial for realising important national objectives. Therefore, the hon'ble members should all respect His Majesty's wishes and instead of prolonging the deliberations reach a consensus to endorse a mechanism for a confidence vote.

The representative of the central monk body said that the deliberation on a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo has caused deep concern among the Clergy. The people of Bhutan had submitted a Genja to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck in 1907 pledging complete support to the institution of hereditary monarchy, in perpetuity. Since then, Bhutan has been a country where "the sun of peace is shining and the song of peace is heard." In particular, the past 26 years of His Majesty the King's reign has taken us further on the road of economic development and Bhutan has become a model country in the world. Therefore, the very idea of a confidence vote in a man of destiny like His Majesty the King is inconceivable to us. Such an erroneous practice like voting on His Majesty the King should be stopped before it is introduced.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering pointed out that by tradition, His Majesty's command must never be refuted nor his shadow tread upon. However, the members had no alternative but to express their views on the third provision of His Majesty's Kasho. Ever since our forefathers submitted a Genja to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck in 1907 and established the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, we have been enjoying peace and happiness under our successive monarchs. At this juncture, the royal directive to decide on a mechanism for registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo has taken us completely by surprise and deeply shocked us. Just as "a desperate man does not know what he is saying and a drowning man will clutch at anything," the members have all been moved to express their views spontaneously because of the deep shock and concern felt by all of us. The Councillor requested His Majesty to overlook their presumption in questioning a royal command.

His Majesty has repeatedly explained that the royal proposal has been made for the present well-being and future interests of the country. Having understood this, we have no alternative but to abide by His Majesty's wishes even though it is with deep regret that we do so. We should, therefore, look upon our endorsement of His Majesty's directive on the confidence vote as a reiteration of the Genja submitted by our forefathers to Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, the first Druk Gyalpo.

The Punakha Chimi said that it used to be a custom to place and keep the King's Kasho on the altar for three days as an object of worship before even reading it. The members of the Assembly have breached this tradition by questioning His Majesty's directive on the confidence vote and they are deeply concerned that this tradition will be violated if the royal directive is not followed. The command of a King is like the waters of a river whose flow cannot be reversed. Further, while it is difficult for the people to think one day ahead, His Majesty looks hundreds of years ahead. Therefore, His Majesty's command must be honoured and the royal proposal on the confidence vote endorsed since refusing to do so would be tantamount to violating the bond of loyalty and faith between King and subject. He stressed, however, that the Genja submitted to the first Druk Gyalpo is still in force, and although a mechanism for a confidence vote should be endorsed, a clause must be inserted that this mechanism can only be activated upon an explicit command from the Throne.

The Trongsa Chimi also supported the endorsement of a mechanism for a confidence vote provided a strong condition is incorporated whereby only His Majesty the King can invoke the use of this mechanism.

The Speaker pointed out that if the 76th Session decides to endorse a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo, then a committee comprising representatives of all 20 Dzongkhags in the National Assembly and representative of the government and Clergy, as directed in the royal Kasho, will draft a mechanism for a confidence vote and present it to the next session of the National Assembly for enactment.

The Chimi of Sombey and Samar geogs in Haa Dzongkhag thanked the Speaker for giving full opportunity to the members to have an extensive discussion on the third directive in the royal Kasho which is a very important matter indeed. All the members have freely expressed their concerns and given their reasons for not wanting a mechanism for a confidence vote to be introduced. The members have submitted so many pleas to

this effect to His Majesty the King that it was almost like chanting millions of mantras and reciting thousands of Kangshag (prayers). The members now have to reconsider the stand taken by them upto now.

Firstly, the sanctity of the Kasho has to be considered. Secondly His Majesty has further explained His reasons for issuing the royal directive. His Majesty's elucidations on the royal directive is like "the vision of the fish which is clearer than the crystal clear water." Although it felt like a poison arrow piercing the heart, the Speaker had also explained the importance of endorsing a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. Therefore, we have no option but to respect the wishes of His Majesty the King and endorse a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Zhemgang Chimi expressed his regret that there is no alternative but to fulfill the royal command on the confidence vote. Although there is a great deal of truth and substance in the submissions made earlier by the Dzongdas and his colleagues, the Chimis, since His Majesty has not accepted their pleas, the members have no alternative but to endorse the royal proposal.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji said that he was struck by the fact that the proposal for instituting a mechanism for a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo had not come from other quarters but emanated from His Majesty the King himself. This reminded him of the great hagiography of King Dri-med Kuenden who sacrificed his own eyes for the sake of the peace and happiness of his subjects. His Majesty the King, who has worked for the welfare of the people for the past 26 years, without any regard for His personal interest or security, is comparable to Dri-med Kuenden. Those of us who are born in His Majesty's era are indeed fortunate.

Through His wise guidance and selfless hard work, His Majesty has raised the nation through adolescence and placed it among the ranks of the adult world. Our country, though small, has attained a stage of development which is almost at par with the developed countries of the world. The Dharma says "all sufferings come from selfish desires, all Bodhisattvas are born from their compassionate concern for others." His Majesty the King, who has proposed the confidence vote out of utter selflessness, is a Bodhisattva in human form who has been born in Bhutan and ascended the golden throne as a fruition of the accumulated merits of the Bhutanese people.

The Councillor acknowledged that His Majesty had taken into consideration the interests of future generations in issuing the royal directive for a mechanism on a confidence vote. Although the royal command is not a proposal which the hon'ble members are happy to endorse, His Majesty has explained that all his policies have always been formulated to promote and safeguard the long term interests of the country. Therefore, the hon'ble members should abide by His Majesty's command with deep gratitude and veneration.

The hon'ble members have all expressed their reservations, concern and anxiety about instituting a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo because the very words "vote of confidence" when associated with His Majesty will cause deep concern among the people. However, since the mechanism for a confidence vote will be beneficial for both the long term and short term interest of the people and the country, the hon'ble members should place their full faith and trust in His Majesty and endorse the royal proposal.

The Yangtse Chimi reminded the members that all the issues raised in the Assembly sessions are first discussed in the Block Development Committees and the District Development Committees, and then submitted to the National Assembly. He said that the issue of the confidence vote should also be discussed in the Block Development Committees and District Development Committees. It should then be submitted for discussion during the 77th Session of the National Assembly.

The representative of the Rabdeys, Uygen Dorji said that the three directives in His Majesty the King's Kasho have caused an "anguish that is unbearable for the heart and a load that is too heavy to be borne." However, as the Kasho was issued for the long term well-being and interest of the country, the hon'ble members had endorsed and supported the first two directives.

The third directive regarding a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo has caused deep alarm and anxiety in the monk body. He recalled that about 350 years ago, when Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel went into retreat, he had ordained that the glorious Palden Drukpa should be governed through a dual system of governance. His Holiness Pekar Juney became the Je Khenpo (chief abbot) and Tenzin Drugyel became the first Desi (temporal ruler). Since then, the glorious Palden Drukpa has been ruled with a combination of religious and temporal order. In 1907, the Clergy, government officials and the people unanimously elected Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary King of Bhutan, and he was enthroned in the presence of many sacred treasures, and with all the Guardian

Deities of the Palden Drukpa to stand witness. A Genja pledging support and loyalty to the institution of hereditary monarchy in perpetuity was also submitted. Since then, the Dharma has flourished and the sun of peace and happiness has been shining in the country of the glorious Palden Drukpa.

He explained that Bhutan is a country where religion and governance co-exist, and each has improved and flourished because of the other. If the discussion now leads to the adoption of a mechanism for registering a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo it may undermine the very foundation of the cherished system of hereditary monarchy. Without our King, our glorious past will mean nothing. As the King is the chief patron of the Dharma it will lead to the decline of the Dharma. Since the source of all peace and happiness is the Dharma it will become difficult for the country to enjoy peace and happiness. He pointed out that problems and suffering prevailed in many countries which are greater than Bhutan because of the religious sectarianism, racial discrimination and misuse of authority in these countries. Bhutan has been free of such problems and has become a model among other nations because the Dharma and good governance have been flourishing side by side in our country. Adopting such a practice like moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo will be a bad Tendrel. If we look back across the snow capped mountains, we will see that Tibet lost its independence because its people did not pay heed to the prophesies of their eminent luminaries of the past and thus created bad Tendrel. The monk body, therefore, appeals to His Majesty the King to reconsider the royal directive on the mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo.

The Chimi of Mewang and Genye geogs in Thimphu Dzongkhag expressed his satisfaction that all the members had participated actively in the discussion on the third directive of the royal Kasho. Keeping in mind the saying, “opinions confined in the mind become poison but when voiced freely are like medicine,” the hon’ble members have expressed their views without hesitation. However, since one thought of His Majesty the King is better than a hundred thoughts of ours, we should honour and abide by the royal command enunciated in His Majesty’s Kasho.

The Chhukha Dzongda said that an extensive discussion had been held on the question of a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. He regretted that in the course of the discussion the members had to submit repeated pleas against the royal directive. He realised that questioning a royal command is not at all in keeping with our sacred traditions and it could undermine the bond of faith and loyalty between King and subject. However, the

repeated pleas by the members were spurred by the values that place His Majesty as a sacred symbol of our unique identity and the life force of the Palden Drukpa. He hoped that His Majesty will overlook the questions and doubts raised by the members. Since a single thought of His Majesty is worth more than thousands of ours, we should have full faith that the royal Kasho was issued in the interests of the nation and the people, and we have now understood this. He said that the Committee which will draft the mechanism for the confidence vote should, however, keep in mind the views and concerns of the people expressed so fervently in this session.

The Tsirang Chimi said that one of the directives in the royal Kasho which they received on 29th July 1998, required a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo. This had deeply perturbed the members and they had expressed their concerns on the adverse effects of such a practice. He said that the people had always supported and fulfilled every command issued by His Majesty the King. They realised now that the royal Kasho had been issued by His Majesty after deep contemplation and requested His Majesty to kindly overlook the doubts and questions they had raised.

The Chimi of Khar and Dungme geogs in Pemagatshel Dzongkhag thanked the Speaker for giving the members full opportunity to discuss the third directive in the royal Kasho. He said that the need to have a mechanism for moving a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo has now been clearly understood and the members are, therefore, prepared to endorse the royal proposal.

The Punakha Chimi said that no matter how much he thought on it, the royal directive on a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo was something which he could not bear to think about. He pointed out that “to the King his people are always dear, and while the people always aspire for peace and happiness, the source of peace and happiness lies in the cherished system of hereditary monarchy.” His Majesty the King has always worked selflessly, both day and night, spurred on by His love for the people to pursue and fulfill the interests of the nation. Fully aware of the noble qualities and selfless deeds of His Majesty the King, the people of Bhutan have total confidence, faith and trust in their beloved King, and their loyalty and support for His Majesty encompasses body, speech and mind.

The Chimi pointed out that the kindness and benevolence of His Majesty the King is so great that it will not be possible for the people to repay what they owe to His Majesty even if their life-spans are doubled. He prayed for a long and glorious reign for His

Majesty and for the cherished system of hereditary monarchy to guide Bhutan's destiny for as long as the waters flow in the rivers so that the glorious Palden Drukpa will also flourish for all time to come. He also prayed that the Bhutanese people will enjoy peace, prosperity and happiness for generation after generation. However, since His Majesty the King had contemplated very deeply before issuing the royal Kasho, and the command of the King cannot be reversed, the members should respect His Majesty's wishes and endorse the royal proposal.

With member after member expressing their views, the essence of the extended and in-depth deliberations on the third directive of the royal Kasho that "the National Assembly should have a mechanism to move a vote of confidence in the Druk Gyalpo," was as follows:

Numerous monarchs, beginning with the Universal Monarch (Cakravartin) of the Three World Systems, have appeared with different methods of political systems, but a monarch who can rule the country based on the principles of Lhachoe Gewa Chu (the Ten Divine Virtues) and Michoe Tshangma Chudrug (the Sixteen Principles of Moral Conduct) is as rare as an Udumvara flower.

The fourth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who was born in Bhutan and ascended the gold throne due to the collective merits of the Bhutanese people, is such a rare and noble monarch. His Majesty never thinks of his personal benefits, but follows the way of a Bodhisattva and is even willing to sacrifice His own life for the welfare of His people, thus becoming an incomparable monarch as said in the Sakya Legshed (Elegant Sayings) :

Though there are many Kings,
There are few who govern with righteousness.
Though there are many heavenly bodies,
None shines brighter than the sun.

All the members were amazed and deeply moved that His Majesty the King in his farsighted wisdom is prepared to not only devolve full executive powers of governance but even relinquish the Throne, if need be, in the interest of the people and the country. The members, therefore, pledged their full faith, loyalty and support, encompassing body speech and mind, to His Majesty the King so that under his wise leadership and the

cherished system of hereditary monarchy the Bhutanese people will enjoy peace, happiness and prosperity for as long as the waters of the rivers flow into the oceans.

The entire responsibility of Choesid Nyiden (spiritual and temporal) has so far been shouldered by His Majesty the King, and through his farsighted vision and dynamic leadership, the country has achieved unprecedented economic progress and prosperity with the Dharma also flourishing more strongly than ever before. Furthermore, the people enjoy peace and happiness and are free to choose their own way of life like the gods of the Trayastrimsa Realm of Thirty-three gods (Sumchu Tsasum). Therefore, the members appealed to His Majesty the King that a mechanism for a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo should not be introduced as it would undermine the cherished institution of hereditary monarchy. Retaining the sanctity of the cherished institution of monarchy with the full support and loyalty of the people is of utmost importance as it will be a good Tendrel in accordance with the maxim of Chuyi Tenchoe (Religious Commentary on Water) which reads:

If a noble, judicious King and His subjects,
both act in accordance with noble values,
good deeds shall accumulate and multiply, Like the union of ocean and rivers,
which are interdependent in their unity.

The Assembly members were at a complete loss when His Majesty the King repeatedly emphasised the need for a mechanism to move a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo because it will be beneficial for the present well-being and future interest and security of the country. However, considering the love and devotion which His Majesty has always shown towards His subjects, more than towards His own children, all the members were moved to endorse the royal proposal out of their faith and loyalty in His Majesty the King.

Concluding the deliberations, the Speaker said that the members have discussed in depth the royal directive that the National Assembly should have a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo. All of us have understood the serious concerns and apprehensions arising in the minds of the Assembly members due to this directive in the royal Kasho, he said. The Speaker, therefore, expressed his appreciation that the members had finally arrived at a consensus to endorse the royal proposal, having understood that His Majesty the King, after deep contemplation over many years, had

issued the Kasho with the long term interest and the security and sovereignty of the nation in mind. In keeping with the guidelines in the royal Kasho, a National Assembly Committee shall be formed to draft the mechanism for moving a confidence vote in the Druk Gyalpo along with the Chathrim for the Council of Ministers. The draft shall be duly submitted to the 77th Session of the National Assembly, he said.

The National Assembly resolved that a committee will be formed comprising representatives of the government and the Clergy, and people's representatives of the twenty Dzongkhags, to draft a Chathrim for the Council of Ministers and a mechanism for registering a confidence vote in His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo. The drafts shall be duly presented to the 77th Session of the National Assembly for deliberation and approval.

VII. REVIEW OF THE 1997-1998 BUDGET AND PRESENTATION OF THE 1998-99 BUDGET.

Copies of the report on the 1997-98 Budget and the National Budget for the Financial Year 1998-99 were distributed to all the members of the National Assembly by the Ministry of Finance on 29th June 1998. On 7th July 1998, the Finance Minister, Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba submitted his report on the 1997-98 Budget and presented the 1998-1999 budget to the National Assembly.

Before making his presentation, the Finance Minister expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for nominating him and the National Assembly for electing him as the Finance Minister of Bhutan. He pledged to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with total loyalty and dedication and discharge his responsibilities to the best of his abilities, to the extent of even sacrificing his life, if necessary, in the course of serving the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The Finance Minister, at the very outset, informed the hon'ble members of the National Assembly that the Financial Year 1997-98 had been successfully concluded. He stated that with the success achieved during 1997-1998 and the bright prospect for the fiscal year 1998-99, the Royal Government was confident about sound fiscal management and successful implementation of the Eighth Five-Year Plan.

After having presented the Budget Report in detail, the Finance Minister highlighted the importance of donor support for the success of the socio-economic plans and programmes. He also informed the hon'ble members of the very positive support received from the

donors so far. The Finance Minister then expressed his deep appreciation to all the donor countries and the multilateral aid agencies for the technical and financial support extended over the years. He also expressed the Royal Government's special gratitude to India, Bhutan's closest friend and neighbour, for their support from the very inception of planned development in the country.

The Finance Minister concluded his presentation with the prayer that the blessings of the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa and the enlightened and far-sighted leadership of His Majesty the King would continue to bring peace and prosperity to Bhutan for all time to come.

(The full text of the National Budget for the Financial Year 1998-99 and the Report on the 1997-98 Budget is attached as Appendix 1)

The Trashigang Chimi expressed his appreciation to the Finance Minister for his clear presentation of the budget report. He also expressed his deep appreciation to His Majesty the King for advising the people on the benefits of buying shares in various business ventures, and making it possible for them to do so with the help of the Dzongkhag administration and the Gups and Chimis. As a result of His Majesty the King's advice during the Plan meetings, the people had bought shares in the Gypsum Mines and the Eastern Bhutan Coal Mining Company, and they were already receiving the benefits from their investments.

The Chimi submitted that the people at large will benefit greatly from buying shares in the RICB, PCA and STCB which was being made possible through the Gups and the Dzongkhag administrations. He said that the people were deeply grateful for the government's policy of looking after the interest of the general public by making the shares available to everyone and not just a few people with the resources to buy them.

The Thimphu Chimi expressed his deep appreciation to the Finance Minister for the report on the national budget which was explained very clearly by him, with copies of the report also distributed to the members. He also expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for reducing the interest on loans from the financial institutions and ensuring that interests were now calculated on simple interest. These measures had been of great benefit to the people. However, he requested the Finance Minister to consider the possibilities of relieving the problems of loan defaulters who could not service their loans due to

unfortunate circumstances and were charged penalty interests which had been made very heavy.

The Finance Minister clarified that it is the practice all over the world to charge interest on borrowed money. He stated that the money in the financial institutions are deposited by the people and does not belong to the government or the financial institutions. It is the responsibility of the financial institutions to look after this money properly and generate good returns on the deposits. As everyone is aware, loan defaults ultimately affect both the people and the government. If the five percent penalty interest is not levied on all loan defaulters, it will not be fair to those who make every possible effort to faithfully repay the loans taken by them. He pointed out that a person who has taken a loan and does not repay it as scheduled and agreed upon cannot be considered for Kidu (welfare consideration).

Kidu cases are those cases where poor people who do not have enough food to eat or clothes to wear are given assistance by the government. Loan defaults which are usually the result of improper utilization of the loans cannot be considered as Kidu especially when other loanees make every effort to repay their loans by going to the extent of liquidating all their assets. That was why the Lhengyel Shuntshog had issued a directive some time back that loan default cases should be forwarded to the Court in keeping with the terms of the loan agreements.

Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Yeshey Dorji expressed his happiness and satisfaction with the budget presentation made by the Finance Minister. In particular, he expressed his satisfaction for the six percent growth in GDP and the 26.7 percent growth in the country's foreign exchange reserves. He also expressed his appreciation for the measures taken to reduce expenditure, build up foreign exchange reserves and increase revenue generation. Noting that the people of Bhutan are the least taxed in the world and that the taxes paid by them would not even cover a fraction of the development budget, the Councillor expressed his deep gratitude to the government for mobilizing the necessary funds for implementing development programmes for the benefit of the people. Promoting socio-economic development required large capital which the government has been able to mobilise despite limited national resources. The fact that the government has been able to meet all recurrent expenditure from internal resources is truly commendable. As the saying goes, "he who has no debt is a rich man," we can look upon Bhutan as a rich country because we are able to meet our recurrent expenditure from our own internal revenue, he said. The Councillor also pointed out that the importance attached by the

government to promoting the social welfare of the people is clearly evident from the fact that 30 percent of the entire budget outlay of the current fiscal year is earmarked for expenditure on the social sector.

While making his intervention on the budget presentation, the Minister for Trade and Industry first expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King and the National Assembly for nominating and electing him as a cabinet minister. He pledged to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of his abilities during the five year tenure.

He said he was greatly impressed by the Finance Minister's presentation of the budget and expressed complete satisfaction with the budget report. On behalf of the business community and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the minister expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for the priority accorded to the development of the private sector. He expressed his hope and confidence that the Trade Ministry and the private sector will be able to make full use of the assistance extended by the government to promote private sector development and industrial growth, thereby contributing to the economic progress and further development of the country.

Regarding the pension scheme for civil servants, His Majesty the King had commanded a substantial increase to be made in the retirement benefits of civil servants, and accordingly, the Ministry of Finance would be carrying out a study following which the matter would be decided. With the increase in the post service benefits, the government servants, also, must serve the country with even greater loyalty and dedication, said the minister.

The Minister for Health and Education also expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King and the National Assembly for reposing full faith and trust in him and electing him as a cabinet minister. He said that far from becoming a minister he had never even expected to become a Dasho, and that Bhutan may be the only country where it is possible for a young civil servant to work his way up the ladder and become a minister. He availed the opportunity to make a solemn pledge in the presence of His Majesty the King and the august gathering of the National Assembly to discharge his responsibilities to the best of his abilities, placing his service to the Tsa-Wa-Sum above his own life. He also extended his warm Tashi Delek to his colleagues, the new cabinet ministers, and to the newly elected Deputy Speaker.

The minister expressed his deep appreciation for the great importance attached by the government to the development of the social sector, particularly in health and education, as is clearly evident from the fact that the budget for the social sector accounted for 30 percent of the total budgetary outlay of the current fiscal year. Even the most developed countries do not allot 30 percent of their budget to the social sector. Many developed countries have a budget allocation of 20 percent or less for the social sector.

The minister reminded the members that throughout his reign, His Majesty the King has always accorded the highest priority to the development of education and health facilities for the benefit of the people of Bhutan. As a result, the Bhutanese people are now enjoying the benefits of the tremendous achievements made in the development of health and education infrastructure all across the country.

In 1961, Bhutan had only 11 schools with just 440 school going children. Today, as a result of the priority accorded by His Majesty the King to the development of the social sector, there are 322 educational institutions in the country with 1,00,198 students. Very few countries in the world could have achieved such unprecedented progress in the field of education in such a short span of time.

Likewise, in the health sector, Bhutan today has 28 hospitals, 145 Basic Health Units, 459 Outreach Clinics, one central indigenous hospital and 11 indigenous units to provide extensive health coverage to the Bhutanese people. Indeed, it is a source of much satisfaction that Bhutan has achieved over 90 percent health coverage. Moreover, patients who cannot be treated in the hospitals in Bhutan are referred for treatment outside with all expenditure borne by the government. The minister informed the members that Nu. 27.60 million was spent on 300 patients who were referred outside the country last year. As the money spent on treating patients outside the country every year could build a new hospital, the Health Division had decided to stop referring patients outside. However, His Majesty the King overruled our decision and commanded that since the Bhutanese people have not reached a level of income where they can pay for specialized medical treatment, patients who cannot be treated in the country must continue to be referred outside. Therefore, the Health Division continues to refer such patients for treatment outside the country. The Bhutanese people have every reason to be deeply grateful to His Majesty the King for providing them with the full benefit of free education and free health coverage, he said.

The minister pointed out that, as already submitted by the hon'ble members during the deliberations, His Majesty the King, without giving any thought to the interests of His own children, has always been thinking single-mindedly about promoting the national interest of the country. If we all follow His Majesty's noble example, every one of us will also be able to render great service to our country, he said. The minister assured the National Assembly that he and his ministry would strive to further develop the health and education sectors to ensure even greater benefit for the people.

The Bumthang Dzongda and the Chimis of Trongsa, Punakha, Bumthang and Zhemgang Dzongkhags expressed their appreciation for the budget presentation by the Finance Minister. They were deeply gratified that Bhutan is able to meet its current expenditure from its internal revenue. At the same time, the budget allocation for capital expenditure would contribute greatly towards further accelerating the rapid socio-economic development taking place in the country. The members expressed their deep gratitude to the government for all these benefits, especially when taking into consideration the fact that the Bhutanese are the least taxed people in the world.

The members expressed their gratitude to all the friendly donor countries and UN agencies for the generous assistance extended by them. In particular, they thanked the Indian government which, despite its own problems, has never failed to assist Bhutan ever since the beginning of the First Five-Year Plan. They expressed their hope and confidence in the continued support of all the friendly donors.

The members also submitted that lowering the interest on loans to 13 percent simple interest had been of great benefit to the people for which they were deeply grateful. They pointed out that many of the loan defaults were a result of improper utilisation of the loans taken. They felt that at the pace Bhutan was developing today, and with the government's concerted efforts, the country would become self-reliant by the end of the Eighth Five-Year Plan.

Several members expressed their happiness and satisfaction that Bhutan's foreign exchange reserves of US\$ 215 million will be enough to meet import requirements for at least two years. The proper utilisation of development funds and the results of which could be seen by everyone indicated that Bhutan will soon be able to achieve its national goal of economic self-reliance. The members also expressed their appreciation for the proposal to increase the retirement benefits of civil servants. They lauded the prudent policy of the government to invest in income generating projects by availing only soft term loans when grants were not forthcoming.

The members expressed the deep gratitude of the people to His Majesty the King and the government for establishing an extensive network of service and development infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, health centres, animal husbandry and agriculture centres, irrigation schemes, roads, power projects and industries, for the benefit of the people and with no cost at all incurred by them. They gave their pledge, on behalf of the people, to ensure that the budgets allocated for development programmes in their geogs and Dzongkhags will be properly utilized and the programmes successfully implemented.

Several Chimis said that it is a source of deep satisfaction for the government and people of Bhutan that the country's current expenditure can be met from its internal revenue and that its foreign exchange reserves are enough to cover two years of import requirements. Also, Bhutan is in a very happy position to repay its entire external debt with 40 percent of its hard currency reserves, if necessary. This is clearly indicative of the great economic development that Bhutan has achieved over the years.

The Punakha Chimi recalled that in His address to the nation in 1974 during the coronation, His Majesty the King had emphasised the important objective of national self-reliance. Taking stock of all the above achievements, the noble vision of His Majesty the King has been fulfilled.

For our part, the people of Bhutan should not remain the least taxed people in the whole of South Asia, said the Chimi. In future, the Bhutanese people must make an effort to pay higher taxes which are commensurate with their incomes.

Some of the members recalled the importance that His Majesty the King has always attached to the youth of Bhutan. Whenever His Majesty visits the schools and educational institutions, He has impressed upon the students that the future of the country lies in their hands. That is why His Majesty had announced a pay increase of 25 to 40 percent for the three categories of teachers in the teaching cadre during his visit to the Teachers Training Institute in Paro. The members expressed their hope that the teachers will also make every effort to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum and realise the vision of His Majesty the King by imparting the best possible education to their students and preparing them for their role as the future citizens of Bhutan.

The members noted that with the successful implementation of all the Five-Year Plans, the Bhutanese people enjoyed the benefits of the tremendous socio-economic progress that

has been achieved and the wide network of service facilities and infrastructure established all over the country. The impressive achievements towards the fulfillment of the cherished goal of national self-reliance has been possible because the concerned ministers and officials of the government have discharged their responsibilities faithfully under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King. The members expressed their hope and confidence that by the end of the Eight Plan, apart from meeting its current expenditure, Bhutan will also be able to meet a significant proportion of its capital expenditure from its own internal resources.

Clarifying various points that were raised, the Finance Minister said he was happy to observe that the hon'ble members appreciated the idea of buying shares in the country's large industrial and commercial undertakings. He assured the members that this will greatly benefit the people and informed them that, on His Majesty the King's command, every effort will be made to ensure that the shares are sold to as many people as possible especially those in rural areas. He hoped that the people will understand the benefits of this policy and respond accordingly. He informed the members that the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Trade and Industry will jointly compile a list of companies and their shares, along with their financial performance. This will be published and distributed, through the Kuensel and the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, among others, so as to encourage larger sections of the people from all the 20 Dzongkhags to benefit from the policy. Once this information has been disseminated and the concerned government ministry receives the list of persons interested in buying shares, the maximum number of shares possible will be sold to people mainly from outside Thimphu and Phuentsholing.

Regarding the rural credit scheme, the Finance Minister said that the government had established the scheme for the benefit of the people and he was happy that the hon'ble members had confirmed the benefits it brought to the people. He informed the members that the government incurred heavy losses on account of the rural credit scheme. Besides having to employ a large number of staff to implement the scheme in all the 20 Dzongkhags, there were also frequent defaults in loan repayments which made it very difficult to disburse new loans.

During His Majesty the King's Dzongkhag tours this year to discuss the Eighth Five-Year Plan programmes with the people, useful discussions had also been held on increasing the size of the rural credit scheme in all the Dzongkhags. Steps are being worked out to improve both the disbursement and repayment of the loans. The level of loan repayments

in some Dzongkhags are as low as 40 to 50 percent and if this situation does not improve the scheme could become a failure.

The Finance Minister urged the Chimis to educate the people on the importance of proper repayment of loans. He explained that, to meet the rural credit demand, the government had to resort to external borrowings. Many donors and multilateral agencies have expressed serious concerns on the poor repayment rate under the rural credit scheme. If the repayment rate continues to be poor the scheme may have to be closed down. On the other hand, if the repayment improves, the government plans to introduce the scheme at the geog level.

Noting that the hon'ble members had taken full cognizance of the budget report submitted by him, the Finance Minister reminded the house that the successful implementation of all development activities upto now had been possible because the government and the people had worked together with one thought and mind. So long as the people and the government continue to work together, hand in hand, there will be no problem in implementing any activity and ensuring even greater progress and prosperity for the country in the years ahead, he said.

The Finance Minister pointed out that the money allocated in the national budget, as always, was for the people of Bhutan. Accordingly, during the recent Eighth Plan meetings in all the Dzongkhags, the people and the concerned government officials had all pledged to work with loyalty and dedication to ensure the proper utilisation of the budgets allocated for the implementation of development programmes in their respective Dzongkhags. This pledge has been reiterated by the Chimis in the august presence of the National Assembly and it is hoped that the strength of this commitment will remain stronger than ever. With the government mobilising the material resources and the people coming forward to provide the physical support, we must ensure a legacy of a prosperous and successful Bhutan for future Bhutanese generations, said the minister.

The National Assembly placed on record that the outstanding economic policies formulated by His Majesty the King, in his single-minded commitment to promote the interest of the people and the country, had brought unprecedented progress and prosperity to Bhutan, with the people enjoying peace and happiness. The discussion on the budget report was concluded with the members of the National Assembly offering a Tashi

Moenlam prayer for the continued peace, progress and prosperity of the Kingdom of the Palden Drukpa.

VIII. BHUTAN-CHINA TALKS

1. BHUTAN-CHINA BORDER TALKS

The Chimi of Kartsho and Bji geogs in Haa Dzongkhag submitted that the people of three geogs in Haa are dependent on yak herds for their livelihood. He said that due to the small size of their grazing land, the people were facing a lot of difficulties as the Tibetan yak herders were encroaching year by year into their traditional pasture land. He, therefore, requested for an update on the progress of the ongoing border talks between the Chinese Government and the Royal Government.

In response, the Secretary of Survey said that beginning from 1984, eleven rounds of boundary talks had been completed so far with China and the results of the talks had all been duly reported to the National Assembly. The 12th round was scheduled to be held in Thimphu in August last year with the Chinese delegation to be led by their Deputy Foreign Minister. However, due to certain problems in China, the Chinese Government had sent the Deputy Secretary General of their Foreign Ministry to Thimphu to intimate to the Royal Government that the talks should be postponed and held in China in 1998. As the talks had not been held so far, the Secretary said that he had no further report to submit to the Assembly. However, as in the past, the outcome of the next round of talks will be duly reported to the National Assembly once the talks are held in China.

The Haa Chimi, while accepting the assurance of the Secretary of Survey that the outcome of the boundary talks will be reported during the next session, explained his reasons for submitting the point in the agenda. He said that the Chinese herders had not only encroached on the traditional pasture land of the people of the three affected geogs of Haa but had even started to prevent the people of Haa from collecting firewood from these areas which had belonged to the people of Haa for many generations.

The National Assembly resolved that, in keeping with the decision of its 75th Session, the Bhutanese officials participating in the boundary negotiations should keep in mind the concerns of the people and the interest of the country while carrying out the boundary negotiations and duly apprise the Assembly about the outcome of the talks.

IX. ISSUES RELATED TO DEVELOPMENT

PROGRAMMES

1. MAINTENANCE OF FEEDER ROADS

The Trashigang Chimi expressed his deep appreciation, on behalf of the people, for the construction of more than 100 kilometers of feeder roads and the provision to construct another 20 kilometers in Trashigang Dzongkhag during the Eighth Plan. As these roads were constructed at a heavy cost, it is imperative that maintenance works are carried out on a regular basis to ensure that the roads will provide maximum benefit for the general public. He, therefore, submitted that a decision be taken as to whether the Public Works Division (PWD) or the Dzongkhag Administration should be given the responsibility of maintaining the feeder roads.

In response, the PWD Secretary informed the members that there are 90 kilometers of feeder roads in Trashigang Dzongkhag and another 20 kilometers will be constructed during the Eighth Plan. He said that a budget of Nu. 6.40 million has been allocated for the repair and maintenance of the existing 90 kilometers of feeder roads while Nu. 42.10 million has been allocated for constructing new roads, thus bringing the total budget for constructing and maintaining motor roads in the Dzongkhag to Nu.48.50 million during the Eighth Plan.

The Secretary said that the question of who should be responsible for the maintenance of feeder roads was discussed during the Sixth and Seventh Plans, and a decision was taken at a meeting in the Planning Ministry which was attended by the Dzongdas of the different Dzongkhags and other concerned officials. It was decided that the PWD should be given the responsibility of maintaining the feeder roads, even though the concerned Dzongkhags should have been made responsible, because it would not be convenient or feasible for the PWD, which had to maintain the national highways, to share its limited pool of machinery and equipment with the Dzongkhags. Therefore, the PWD has been maintaining all feeder roads upto now. The Secretary pointed out that as the investigation of any problem concerning feeder roads is being carried out by the respective Dzongkhag administrations, in keeping with His Majesty the King's command, if the responsibility of maintaining them is also given to the Dzongkhags, it could affect the investigations. Therefore, it would be better if the responsibility of maintaining feeder roads is retained with the PWD as decided during the meeting held by the Planning Ministry.

The Royal Advisory Councillor, Dasho Lungten Tshering said that every Dzongkhag in Bhutan had feeder roads. The government had constructed roads where there were no roads, bridges where there were no bridges and brought water where there was no water. Earlier, when there were no motor roads in Bhutan, it took fourteen days to travel from Mongar to Tencholing, a journey which today can be completed in just one day. Over the years, the people have been receiving Kidu after Kidu from the government. With the government providing the budget and material requirements, and the people contributing labour, feeder roads had been constructed in all the Dzongkhags, for which he expressed his deep appreciation.

Although it was not befitting to ask for more Kidu after receiving so much already, the Councillor requested for gravel soling to be done on the feeder roads so that they can be used during the rainy season. He explained that during the summer months it becomes extremely difficult for the farmers to transport their farm produce to the market due to the slushy roads and the refusal of truck owners to ply their vehicles on such roads. Regarding the maintenance of feeder roads, he said that the responsibility should continue to be given to the PWD.

The Trashigang Chimi submitted that the motor road to Thrimshing Dungkhag which had been constructed at great cost to the government had not been maintained for the last five years. He requested the PWD Secretary to clarify whether the road is not going to be maintained at all or whether a new road is going to be constructed.

In response, the PWD Secretary said that the roads in the country have been constructed and properly maintained so that the people can travel on them without facing problems. At no point of time had people been prevented from travelling due to extended road blocks resulting from poor maintenance of roads. He reminded the members that all feeder roads were graveled while the national highways and motor roads to the Dzongkhag Headquarters were either black-topped or in the process of being black-topped. However, he pointed out that the existing budget would be insufficient if all feeder roads, also, had to be black-topped. Therefore, the renovation and maintenance of feeder-roads will be carried out in accordance with the policy of the PWD. Regarding the Thrimshing road, he said that it had not been maintained for the last two to three years because the public of Thrimshing had submitted to the National Assembly that the road did not benefit them, and they had requested for a new road. The National Assembly had decided that if the road did not benefit the public of Thrimshing, there was no point in maintaining it. However, it was

found out later that the area through which the proposed new road was to be constructed is not stable and a very large budget will be required to build the road. Since then, the PWD had received a letter through the District Development Committee stating that instead of building a new road, the existing road to Thrimshing Dungkhag should be renovated and maintained. Accordingly, the PWD has already started maintenance work on the Thrimshing road.

The National Assembly decided that, as submitted by the PWD Secretary, all problems concerning feeder roads shall be investigated by the concerned Dzongkhag administrations and, based on their reports, all maintenance and renovations of the feeder roads shall be carried out by the PWD in keeping with the existing practice.

2. STONE QUARRY AT SERTIKHAREY AND LIME STONE MINING AT RONGRI TO BE DISCONTINUED

The Gelephu Chimi submitted that the public of Gelephu Geog in Sarpang Dzongkhag submitted that there had been a rapid degradation of the environment around Gelephu after the opening of the stone quarry at Sertikharey and limestone mining at Rongri near the Gelephu hot spring. He said that these mines have given rise to land slides and destruction of forests and cash crop orchards in the surrounding areas. Drinking water sources for the nearby villages have also dried up due to the destruction of catchment areas. Therefore, if work on the quarries are continued, there is an imminent danger of extensive farmland below the quarry being rendered infertile, besides leaving an unsightly scar on the mountains overlooking the Gelephu town. Although the people of Gelephu are aware of the revenue that these mines generate for the government, we feel that in order to preserve and protect our pristine environment for our future generations there is an urgent need to either scale down or discontinue the mining activities, said the Chimi.

Explaining the reasons for the establishment of the stone quarry at Sertikharey, the Joint Secretary of the Division of Power informed the members that when the geologists from the Ministry of Trade and Industry conducted a survey from Samdrupjongkhar to Samtse, they found abundant stone reserves in Sertikharey which they felt would be a suitable site for a quarry. The Royal Government, therefore, decided to open a stone quarry at Sertikharey with the aim of exporting stones to Bangladesh and earning some revenue.

The Joint Secretary clarified that the quarry is about 23 acres in size and except for hard rocks and steep rocky slopes, the area has no forest cover or water. Therefore, the Chimi's

submission that the establishment of the quarry had destroyed catchment areas is not true because there is no water in the area in the first place. However, it was found that extracting stones from the quarry could harm the surrounding natural environment and, upon the command of His Majesty the King, all work had been stopped and the quarry has now been closed down.

Regarding the limestone mining at Rongri, the Joint Secretary explained that the Ministry of Trade and Industry had leased the mine for supplying limestone to the Bhutan Calcium and Carbide Limited (BCCL), Phuentsholing after conducting a survey of the area and obtaining clearance from the National Environment Commission. (NEC). Upto now the contractor has invested a total of Nu.3.50 million on the mine. The Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Forestry Services Division and the NEC have all instructed the contractor to ensure that no damage is caused to the catchment areas and the natural environment and that no trees are felled without permission. The Forestry Services Division has been carrying out frequent inspections.

He said that upto now there have been no landslides or any damage caused to the environment in the area. On the other hand, the road built to transport limestone from the mines has stimulated business activities and greatly benefited the people in the area. It has also benefitted the transport operators of Gelephu who are able to utilise their trucks to transport limestone from the mine. The regular supply of raw materials from the mine has contributed to the successful operation of the BCCL which has been paying an annual royalty of Nu.50 million to the government, besides providing employment to a large-number of Bhutanese people. The Joint Secretary submitted that keeping the Rongri mine open will be very beneficial as it will contribute towards revenue generation for the government and increasing the income of the local population.

Supporting the motion, the Minister for Trade and Industry said that he fully shared the concerns of the public of Gelephu on the potential threat to the environment from the stone quarry at Sertikharey and the limestone mine at Rongri. He commended them for submitting the issue for deliberation in the National Assembly. He informed the members that the government accorded high importance to protecting and preserving Bhutan's pristine environment and big forest cover. He agreed with the Gelephu Chimi that if the natural environment and forest cover is not protected it will lead to soil erosion, landslides, floods and damage to catchment areas along with other forms of environmental degradation.

The minister pointed out that in other countries the government and the people work hand in hand to protect and preserve their environment. In Bhutan, it is only the government which has been taking the responsibility of protecting the environment and the people have not been participating in such schemes. On the contrary, some of the people have caused serious damage to the environment through exploitation of forest resources for personal gain. Protecting the environment and forest cover is of paramount importance, he said. At the same time, a country's natural resources should also be properly utilised to promote its industrial and commercial growth.

He reminded the members that His Majesty the King has always kept in mind both the present and future interests of the country when embarking upon any development activity. Moreover, while issuing licences and contracts, the Ministry of Trade and Industry has been strictly following the provisions of the Forest Act and the Mines and Minerals Act which were enacted by the National Assembly in 1995. Regarding Sertikharey, all works had stopped after the government issued a directive to close down the quarry. Regarding the BCCL, the minister informed the members that 50 percent of its raw material had to be imported because the limestone supplied from Phuentsholing and the Rongri mine in Gelephu could only meet half its requirement.

The minister pointed out that the availability of raw materials from within the country is an important requisite for the viability of industrial projects. In Bhutan, all machinery and most of the manpower requirements for industrial projects had to be imported. If raw materials also had to be imported it would create a serious problem for the viability of industrial projects in Bhutan. Therefore, the Rongri mines should be allowed to remain open for the time being. If the operation of the mine creates any problem for the environment or damages the forest, the Trade Ministry and the Dzongkhag administration should look into the matter together and take a suitable decision.

The Sarpang Dzongda said that since the issue of the limestone mine at Rongri was raised several times in the District Development Committee meetings, he had carried out an on-site inspection of the Rongri mine and the surrounding areas. It was found that the soil in the surrounding area is loose and unstable, and frequent blastings in the mines had caused landslides and floods. Moreover, the mining activities had affected the nearby cash crop orchards and there was a risk that the catchment area could also be affected. The mining activities could also harm the hundreds of acres of agricultural land below the mines. The

Rongri mine is also aggravating the frequent flooding by the Maokhola river during the summer months, he said.

Another problem regarding the Rongri mines is that all the labourers employed are non-nationals and, given the present situation, some of them could pose a security risk.

The Dzongda clarified that the people had raised this issue not because they are objecting to any decision taken by the government but because they wish to ensure that the natural environment in Sarpang will be bequeathed in pristine condition to future generations. The people will be happy with whatever decision is taken by the government after carefully considering all aspects of the matter.

Making an intervention, one of the Royal Advisory Councillors noted that repeated submissions had been made that the mining activities at Rongri was affecting the drinking water sources for the people and causing landslides in the area. Pointing out that since the government and the people are basically one and the same, he suggested that assistance should be extended to resolve the problems faced by the people. New types of explosives which cause less reverberations to the surrounding areas should be used to reduce landslides. This will benefit both the government and the people, he said.

The Minister for Trade and Industry informed the members that he had interviewed the senior personnel of the Rongri limestone mine and asked them about the adverse impact the mining activities was said to be having on the drinking water sources and cash crop orchards of the people in the area. They had informed him that there are no human settlements near the Rongri mine nor are there any water source points in the area. Similarly, they had stated that the mining activities did not affect the cash crop orchards in any way.

The minister assured the members that the government will never frame policies which will cause difficulties and problems for the people. He suggested that a decision could be taken for the Ministry of Trade and the Dzongkhag administration to jointly investigate the matter. If it is found that the mining activities at Rongri are causing genuine problems for the people and seriously harming the natural environment, a suitable action could then be taken.

The Gelephu Chimi endorsed the suggestion of the Minister for Trade and Industry.

The National Assembly resolved that the stone quarry at Sertikharey shall remain closed as commanded by His Majesty the King because it was harming the environment and creating problems for the local population. Regarding the Rongri mine, a joint team of the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Sarpang Dzongkhag shall conduct an investigation at an appropriate time to ascertain whether the mining activities are harming the environment and creating problems for the local population. Suitable action shall then be taken according to the findings of the investigation.

3. NATIONAL HIGHWAY FROM GYALPOZHING TO NGANGLAM

The Saleng Chimi submitted that the public of Saleng Geog under Mongar Dzongkhag requested that a motor road, approximately 67 kilometers long, be constructed from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam as part of the national highway. They submitted that since goods from Samdrupjongkhar can be transported to Mongar only via Trashigang it has been causing much inconvenience to the people. The construction of the new road, as requested, will benefit three Dzongkhags, namely Mongar, Lhuentse and Pemagatshel and also facilitate the establishment and maintenance of transmission lines from the Kurichu Hydroelectric Project to Assam, India. The people, requested for this road to be constructed during the Eighth Five-Year Plan.

Supporting the motion, the Mongar Chimi informed the members that during His Majesty the King's visit to Mongar Dzongkhag, His Majesty had said that while a motor road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam would greatly facilitate the erection of transmission lines from the Kurichu Hydroelectric Project, the necessary budget was not available. Therefore, the government was considering the construction of this road after taking up the matter with the Indian Government. The 67 kilometer road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam would not only benefit the people of the three Dzongkhags of Pemagatshel, Mongar and Lhuentse but also the people of Dogar geog in Zhemgang Dzongkhag in transporting their cash crop produce like oranges. It will also benefit the Kurichu Hydroelectric Project and the Dungsam Cement Project, he said. He, therefore, requested for a motor road to be constructed between Gyalpozhing and Nganglam.

In response, the PWD Secretary informed the members that, as submitted by the Mongar Chimi, the proposed road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam is about 68 kilometers on the map. The construction of this road will require a budget of Nu. 318.30 million besides the Nu.120 million which will be needed for the construction of three bridges across the Sorphu

Rongchu, Kurichu and the Dangmechu rivers. The total budget required, therefore, comes to Nu.438.30 million. However, since the request for constructing this road was not received from the concerned Dzongkhag when the Eighth Plan programmes were drawn up, it could not be included in the Plan programmes.

When the people submitted their request for constructing this new road to His Majesty the King during his visit to the eastern Dzongkhags for the Eighth Plan meetings, His Majesty had informed them that while the proposed road would benefit them greatly, mobilizing funds was proving very difficult as the road will pass through areas infested with ULFA and Bodo militants. However, since the construction of this road would greatly benefit the people of three to four Dzongkhags, besides facilitating the erection of transmission lines from the Kurichu Project and transportation of materials, the PWD will be able to construct the road if the funds could be made available by the Kurichu Project, said the PWD Secretary.

On this, the Joint Secretary of the Power Division reminded the members that His Majesty the King had decided to establish the Kurichu Project to promote the socio-economic development of the six eastern Dzongkhags. Discussions for establishing the project and preparation of feasibility reports were started as far back as the Fifth Plan period. Since we did not have adequate resources of our own and outside assistance could not be obtained as and when we wanted, the Kurichu Project could be started only during the Seventh Plan.

The Joint Secretary informed the members that it was due to His Majesty the King's constant efforts and the high regard that the Government of India has for His Majesty that India agreed to provide funding for the Kurichu Project. Accordingly, the agreements were signed by the two governments and the project was started. Thereafter, in order to facilitate the transportation of materials, the road from Kurizampa to Samdrupjongkhar had to be widened. The road from Rongia in Assam to Samdrupjongkhar, also, had to be improved. Further, new bridges had to be constructed to replace the old bridges at Trashigang Chagzam and at Sherichu which were not strong enough to take the weight of trucks carrying the heavy machineries required for the Project.

The Joint Secretary informed the members that a total of Nu.1,000 million was spent on the widening of the road and construction of the new bridges. The works which are underway were contracted out to Project DANTAK.

He also informed the members that a total of Nu.4,000 million will be spent on the Kurichu Project. Out of this, 60 percent is grant from Government of India and 40 percent, which comes to about 1,600 million, is a loan to the Royal Government at 11 percent interest. The annual interest alone for this loan comes to Nu.172 million. Therefore, it will not be feasible or prudent for the viability of the Kurichu Project if funds are diverted for unbudgeted expenditure, as proposed by the PWD Secretary, to construct the Gyalpozhing-Nganglam road.

The Mongar Dzongda clarified that although the proposal for the construction of the road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam was discussed in the District Development Committee, a decision was not taken because the proposed road benefited many other Dzongkhags besides Mongar and also the country as a whole. He further clarified that although the proposal for the construction of this road was not included in the Eighth Plan, during His Majesty's visit to the eastern Dzongkhags the people had submitted their request for this road to be constructed.

He said that although the Joint Secretary of the Power Division had stated his inability to allocate any fund from the Kurichu Project, he was of the view that the proposed road would greatly benefit the Kurichu Project. He pointed out that 132 KV transmission lines will have to be erected from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam which in turn calls for the transportation of heavy accessories such as metal poles and cables which are very difficult to carry. As a result, he said that the transportation of these materials could take a long time.

If the proposed road is constructed it will be possible for all works to be completed in half the time. Even after the transmission lines are laid, the motor road will benefit field personnel who would otherwise have to walk for days to carry out repair and maintenance work. Presently, as all goods and commodities from Samdrupjongkhar have to be brought to Mongar via Trashigang, a detour of a hundred kilometers, the prices of these commodities are that much higher. The construction of this proposed road will lower the prices for the consumers. Moreover, it will expedite the development of three geogs in Pemagatsel Dzongkhag, two geogs in Zhemgang Dzongkhag and four geogs in Mongar Dzongkhag, a total of nine geogs which are some of the remotest areas in the country.

The Dzongda also pointed out that the construction of the new road will enable farmers to market their cash crop produce on time instead of having them go to waste because of transportation problems. With the distance greatly shortened from Mongar to the Dungsam

Cement Project, the price of cement will also be reduced with the reduction of transportation costs. It is obvious that the proposed road will benefit the Kurichu Project, the Dungsam Cement Project and the people of the six eastern Dzongkhags. Recalling that the PWD Secretary had submitted that Nu.438.30 million will be required to construct this road, he pointed out that if the road is constructed via Mikuri, only one bridge will be required across the Dangmechu river, thus reducing the cost considerably. He concluded his intervention by pointing out that the construction of this road will stimulate commercial activity in the region and contribute towards realising His Majesty the King's noble vision of bringing greater prosperity to the people of the eastern Dzongkhags.

The Thimphu Chimi, a Royal Advisory Councillor, the Lhuentse Chimi and the Pemagatshel Dzongda duly noted the submissions by the PWD Secretary and the Joint Secretary of the Power Division that the proposal for the Gyalpozhing-Nganglam road had neither been included in the Eighth Plan nor did the government have the funds to build it. However, since motor roads are one of the most important pre-requisites for the development of a country, they requested the government to give careful consideration to the construction of this road. They requested the government not to consider the present expenditure only but also the future benefits that will accrue from building this road.

Without this road the farmers having cash crop orchards in the area will not be able to sell their oranges due to transportation problems, as pointed out by the Mongar Dzongda. They will also be unable to market other agricultural produce. If the road is constructed it will become feasible for a farmer who has 100 orange trees to plant one thousand more. A farmer having just one cow will be able to think of raising a whole herd. As the saying goes, "if there is gold in the earth, the sky will reflect the glow," if the road is constructed, the benefits will accrue naturally. They requested the government to carefully consider the benefits to the people and work out a solution for the road to be constructed.

Some members pointed out that if a motor road is constructed from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam, the distance from Trashigang to Samdrupjongkhar will be reduced by more than half and it will greatly benefit the people of at least five Dzongkhags. The time taken for laying the transmission lines from the Kurichu Project at Gyalpozhing to Deothang will also be reduced by half, as submitted by the Mongar Dzongda. Both the Kurichu Project and the Dungsam Cement Project will become operational much earlier, resulting in quicker generation of revenue for the government. Therefore, these members also requested for the proposed road to be constructed.

The Minister for Health and Education said that the need to construct a motor road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam is genuine, as submitted by the Chimis of the eastern Dzongkhags. Having toured the area from Gyalpozhing to Pemagatshel on foot, he had seen the difficulties and problems faced by the people in the area due to the absence of a motor road. On reaching Thimphu after his tour, he had explained the need for a motor road in the area to the PWD Secretary. He suggested that instead of passing the responsibility for constructing the road back and forth between the PWD and the Power Division, a decision should be taken on how to construct the road phase by phase even if it cannot be completed in one period due to lack of funds. It was important to decide on a solution that would be acceptable to both the people and the government and fulfill the wishes of the people of the eastern Dzongkhags.

The National Assembly noted that although the proposed road from Gyalpozhing to Nganglam will benefit the people of several Dzongkhags it was, however, not included in the Eighth Five-Year Plan and there were certain problems regarding its construction including the lack of funds. However, since the Royal Government is fully aware of the benefits of building the proposed Gyalpozhing - Nganglam road, the request for its construction shall be given due consideration and every effort shall be made to mobilise external assistance to build this road.

4. REGULARISATION OF SATELLITE TOWNS

The public of Lumang, Khaling and Shongphu geogs in Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that, over the years, both temporary as well as permanent constructions have been carried out on government land at some points along the national highway and on privately owned paddy fields. As a result, the number of shops and houses have increased manifold in these areas which have become like established towns and the Dzongkhag Administration has been restrained in taking measures to curb the growth of these towns.

Taking into account the welfare of the public, the Dzongkhag Administration had forwarded the case of these towns to the Home Ministry vide letter No:DAT/ADM/-64/96-97/1407 along with detailed maps and lists of persons who had constructed houses. Therefore, the people requested that these towns, namely Womrong, Khaling and Rangjung be regularized as satellite towns at the earliest, in accordance with the terms and conditions laid down by the Royal Government.

Responding to the submission, the PWD Secretary informed the members that many satellite towns are situated too close to the national highways. As per the provisions of the Road Act, construction of houses are not allowed within 50 feet on either side of the highways. This provision has been incorporated in the Act in order to prevent children from being run over by speeding vehicles. Another important reason for this is to cater for future widening of the highways. Therefore, if the matter is not resolved, it would adversely affect the widening of the national highways in future. He pointed out that if the concerned city corporations do not investigate the satellite towns, it will lead to much inconvenience and problems in the future. Therefore, he said that it would be better if the PWD surveyed the satellite towns and decided on the course of action to be taken in consultation with the concerned Dzongkhag.

The Trashigang Dzongda informed the members that the satellite towns of Womrong and Khaling had been started in 1963-64 when the people of these localities set up tea stalls, bars and small shops on either side of the highway which had then just been constructed. These shops, some of which are permanent structures while others are temporary houses, were all built upon government land. Even after twenty to thirty years these houses still do not have Gung (house) Numbers. As a result, the owners do not pay house tax (Gungthrey) or contribute Shapto-Lemi (labour contribution). On the other hand, these people have been enjoying more benefits from the social welfare facilities than the people in the villages. As this was not fair on the people in the villages they complained to the District Development Committee where the matter was discussed at length. However, since there were no clear directives from the government on the matter, the Dzongkhag could not take any action, he said.

The Dzongda recalled that the Home Ministry had issued a circular in 1988 prohibiting the construction of houses within 50 feet on either side of the highways and on government land, pasture land and on Sokshing land. However, since these houses had been constructed before the circular was issued, the Dzongkhag could not send these cases to the Court as per the circular. These 136 households who have constructed houses in the satellite towns are not outsiders but our own people. The government must, therefore, think carefully while determining whether they should be imposed land tax, house tax and Shapto-lemi from the day they built their houses, as well as cost of land based on the measurements in the cadastral maps. It must also be considered whether the people of Rangjung who have constructed houses on paddy land should be imposed fines. Moreover, there may be similar

problems in all the other Dzongkhags. He, therefore suggested that before taking any decision, the matter should be discussed thoroughly.

Supporting the submission, the Trashigang Chimi informed the members that although the land at Rangjung upon which the present satellite town had sprung up was paddy land, it could not be cultivated because of severe water problems. The problem became worse when a flood washed away the area about thirteen to fourteen years back. Therefore, in 1988-89, as requested by the people, the government constructed an irrigation canal from Chhaling. However, the frequent occurrence of floods in summer had not only destroyed the canal but even posed a grave danger to the local school and village houses. Therefore, as the area is a suitable location for a satellite town, houses had been built on the barren paddy land. He requested the National Assembly to kindly consider the possibility of giving Kidu to these houses in the Rangjung satellite town along with the houses constructed within 50 feet on either side of the national highway as in other towns.

A Royal Advisory Councillor pointed out that in the circular issued by the Home Ministry in 1988, there was no clause prohibiting the construction of houses along the highway. The circular simply prohibited the construction of houses on paddy land but did not provide for any penalties for non-compliance. He, therefore, requested the National Assembly to decide that while conducting an investigation into the problem of the satellite towns, the Home Ministry and the PWD should jointly amend the above circular and insert a provision for penalising those who construct houses on paddy land, keeping in mind the present and future interest of the country.

In response, the Secretary of Survey pointed out that as the rules regarding construction of houses on paddy fields and establishment of towns are clearly laid down in the Land Act, there should not be any problem if such matters are dealt with according to the law. As far as paddy land is concerned, he informed the members that until 1988 the people were free to use their land as they wanted. However, His Majesty the King, concerned by the fact that it is not easy to make paddy fields and that the country is still not self-sufficient in rice which is the main diet of the people, and in order to preserve and protect paddy land, issued a Kasho prohibiting conversion of paddy land into any other categories of land.

He pointed out that although the penalty for converting paddy fields into any other form of land is clearly provided in the law, the people in the rural as well as urban areas are not following the law, thereby creating problems. Further, he pointed out that the question of

paddy land does not arise in the case of land demarcated as urban areas because the rules and regulations of the city corporation will govern the use of such land. He suggested that since the Dzongdas are themselves the Chairmen of the City Corporations of their respective Dzongkhags, it would be appropriate if their actions are guided by the existing laws.

The Thimphu Chimi and the Haa Chimi suggested that the issue of satellite towns may be dealt with by the PWD after conducting a thorough investigation. At the same time, on seeing the rich and well-to-do stay in the towns, the villagers who have many children and family members tend to settle along the highways with the hope of earning a small income or sometimes just to live away from their villages. In some cases, motor roads have run through the middle of people's land with their remaining land lying on either side of the roads. Therefore, these people have also built houses next to the highways. As a saying goes, "load for the yak and milk from the Bji (female yak)," he requested that the issue be resolved in a manner which will not harm the government or cause problems and difficulties for the people.

Regarding the penalties for those people who have already constructed houses next to the highways, they said that just as it is the parents who are bothered by their children, it is to the government that the people appeal for Kidu (welfare consideration). Since these people are liable to be fined heavily although their income is very small and they had already spent money to construct their houses, the Chimis requested the government to consider the Kidu aspect of this matter as it has always done for the people.

The Trashigang Dzongda agreed that, as pointed out by the PWD Secretary, after the Town Planning Committee declares an area as a town, all land within it will be dealt with as per the rules and regulations of the City Corporation without any classification of whether they are paddy land, dry land or Tseri etc. However, he clarified that the satellite towns of Womrong, Khaling and Rangjung in Trashigang Dzongkhag had not been declared as towns. That is why the submission has been made to the National Assembly, he said.

The Dzongda informed the members that during the Seventh Plan when this case was reviewed by the government officials visiting Trashigang, the Planning Ministry had noted that since each of these towns had many houses and were bigger than Trashigang town, it would be better to declare them as satellite towns. Subsequently, the Planning Ministry had issued a circular to this effect and with drawings of the towns also made, work on the

townships were underway. Regarding the submission of the Haa Chimi that penalty should be excused on the grounds of Kidu for those who had already constructed houses, the point he had raised was not about imposing penalties. The facts of the case have to be considered. These people have constructed houses on government land about twenty to thirty years back without obtaining permission, and they have been enjoying the full benefits of health and educational facilities without paying any form of taxes or contributing to Shapto-lemi. Therefore, he had submitted that these people should be made to pay land tax and house tax and contribute towards Shapto-lemi like all other people in their geogs.

He pointed out that as members of society, everyone should have the same social obligations. Regarding those people who have illegally occupied government land it should be left upto the government to impose penalty as deemed necessary and there was no need to discuss this in the Assembly. Nevertheless, he submitted that some penalty must be imposed. Otherwise, the laws of the land will be rendered meaningless and ineffective.

The Minister for Trade and Industry pointed out that there are no separate laws and policies for the government and the people. All laws are framed with the present and future interest of the people in mind and, therefore, apply equally to all concerned. He said that if the rules and regulations relating to towns and satellite towns are not framed properly there is every risk that serious problems will arise in the future. If the people keep constructing houses next to the highways today, it will result in many houses having to be demolished when the roads may have to be widened in the future. People living in such areas will also face serious risk to their lives from road accidents.

He pointed out that since the laws are made for the present and future well-being and stability of the country, the fault is not in the law but in those responsible for implementing them. Regarding the illegal construction of houses, he warned that if the rules and regulations are not implemented strictly there will be many more violations in the future. The point under discussion is very important because it is relevant for the whole country and not just for Trashigang. It will, therefore, be very beneficial if a decision is taken to direct the PWD and the Dzongkhag administrations to work out a solution to the existing problems of illegal constructions in towns and take steps to ensure that such problems do not arise in the future.

The Thimphu Chimi noted that submissions regarding the construction of houses on paddy land were being made not because there are no laws on this matter or because no efforts are

being made to curb such practices in the geogs, but rather to arrive at a decision on how to resolve the problem of illegal constructions in satellite towns.

Upto now, the responsibility of monitoring and curbing house constructions on paddy land had been delegated by the Dzongkhag administrations to the Gups and Chimis, and the Block Development Committees. Any person wanting to construct a house must seek permission after clearly indicating on which category of land under his Thram he wants to build his house. There are, however, no penalty provisions for violating this law and constructing houses on paddy land. If a person still refuses to desist from constructing the house on paddy land then there have been cases where the house has been demolished by the members of the District Development Committee. Therefore, houses cannot be built on paddy land without permission from the government, he said.

The Speaker noted that regarding the issue of house construction on paddy land and its related problems, as submitted by some of the members, there is a need to submit a separate agenda on the issue for deliberation in the next session of the Assembly.

With regard to the issue on satellite towns, he said that as submitted by the PWD Secretary and the Minister for Trade and Industry, there is a genuine problem, as all the members are also fully aware.

He suggested that the Ministry of Communication should study the problem of the satellite towns, keeping in mind the availability of funds and the feasibility under the Plan programmes. Henceforth, the establishment of new towns should be carried out in accordance with the policy and the rules and regulations laid down by the government

The National Assembly resolved that, for the present and future interest of the country, the Ministry of Communication shall survey and study the problems regarding the satellite towns and act in accordance with existing laws.

X. ISSUE OF RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

1. APPRECIATION FOR RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMME

The Chimis of Pemagatsel, Sarpang, Trongsa and Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhags expressed the deepest gratitude and appreciation of the people to His Majesty the King and

the Royal Government for implementing the resettlement programme in accordance with the resolution of the 75th Session of the National Assembly, and said it was a boon for the landless people of their Dzongkhags.

Similarly, the public of Chuzangang, Umling and Jigmecholing geogs in Sarpang Dzongkhag expressed their heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for settling landless people like themselves on fertile areas of land in Sarpang Dzongkhag.

Joining the vote of thanks for the resettlement programme, the Trongsa Chimi expressed his gratitude to His Majesty the King for granting land Kidu in southern Bhutan to the landless people of Trongsa Dzongkhag. He also expressed the hope and prayers of the people that such land Kidu will be granted to all landless people as per the decision of the 75th Session of the National Assembly as this would go a long way in improving the living standards of the general public.

Likewise, the public of Samdrupjongkhar expressed their deep gratitude to the Royal Government for allotting land Kidu to 103 landless households in Sarpang and Tsirang. They said that the resettlement programme has greatly benefited the poor landless people of their Dzongkhag and requested for the remaining landless people to be granted Kidu land under the resettlement programme.

Supporting the above submissions, the Sarpang Dzongda said that those people who have been resettled in Sarpang are deeply grateful to His Majesty the King for granting them Kidu land. They have been expressing their gratitude in the District Development Committee and in every Zomdu (meeting) attended by them.

Further, the Southern Bhutanese in Sarpang have also expressed their heartfelt gratitude to the government for settling landless people in their Dzongkhag. They said that the incidence of terrorist raids and attacks by the ngolops had greatly reduced with the resettlement of the landless people.

The Secretary of Survey informed the members that, in keeping with the resolution of the 75th Session of the National Assembly and the command of His Majesty the King, the Home Ministry had received applications for resettlement from 3,504 households who either did not have any land in their Thram or were solely dependent on Tseri (shifting

cultivation). After thorough investigation of the applications which were all received through the respective Dzongkhags, the Resettlement Committee selected 1,574 of these households for immediate resettlement. However, only 1,027 households could be resettled upto now. The resettlement of the remaining households will continue after the rainy season, he said.

The National Assembly placed on record the deep satisfaction and heartfelt gratitude of all the members to His Majesty the King for granting Kidu to the landless people and people dependent on shifting cultivation by including them in the resettlement programme. Regarding the request for the resettlement programme to be continued, the National Assembly resolved that resettlement shall be carried out in accordance with the resolutions of the previous sessions of the National Assembly.

2. RESETTLEMENT PROGRAMMES

The public of Gelephu, Leopani, Sarpangtar, Hilley, Singey and Kalikhola under Sarpang Dzongkhag submitted that the resettlement of landless people in Umling, Chuzangang and Jigmecholing geogs in Sarpang Dzongkhag have enhanced the living condition of the local people. Those families who had left their land due to fear of terrorist attacks could return and begin re-cultivation of their lands as they could now avail the company of the new settlers. They said that with the increase of people in these geogs, security has been strengthened and infiltration of ngolops and their terrorist activities in the region has been, to an extent, controlled. Therefore, the people of Sarpang once again reiterated their request to the Royal Government to continue resettlement of landless people in the remaining geogs of the Dzongkhag as well.

The public of Kilkhorthang, Tsokhana, Tsirangdara, Phuntenchhu, Patali and Gosheling geogs in Tsirang Dzongkhag expressed their happiness and gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for resettling landless people in Tsirang Dzongkhag. They requested that the resettlement programme be continued in the Dzongkhag so that all the vacant land could be allotted to the landless people which would help in providing the farmers in the area with neighbours and enhance their security.

The Samtse Dzongda submitted that the public of Samtse had repeatedly requested for resettlement of landless people on the vacant land in Samtse Dzongkhag in the Block Development Committee and District Development Committee meetings. The request of the people was also conveyed to the Home Ministry and the Planning Ministry. When His

Majesty the King visited Samtse Dzongkhag for the Eighth Plan meeting with the people in April this year, many people attending the meeting reiterated this request to His Majesty.

He added that as Samtse is a border district which is very close to the ngolop camps across the border, the ngolops have been frequently infiltrating into the district to carry out terrorist activities against the people. He said that there are two main reasons why the public of Samtse are requesting for landless people to be resettled in the Dzongkhag. Firstly, it will solve the difficulties and hardship of the landless people. Secondly, the presence of the resettlers will provide them with the company of more people and thereby help to reduce the incidence of terrorist attacks by the ngolops. He, therefore, reiterated the public's request for resettlement of landless people to be carried out soon in Samtse Dzongkhag just as it was done in Sarpang and Tsirang.

Similarly, the Samdrupjongkhar Dzongda expressed his deep appreciation to His Majesty the King for the resettlement, last year, of landless people and those dependent on shifting cultivation. He informed the house that Samdrupjongkhar had sufficient vacant land to resettle people in the thousands and requested for landless people to be resettled in his Dzongkhag. He submitted that this would have the benefit of landless people receiving land and also contributing towards reducing the incidence of forest fires in the dry months of March and April, thereby protecting the environment. Further, as the members are fully aware, ULFA and Bodo militants have taken sanctuary in the jungles of Samdrupjongkhar, and the resettlement of people on the vacant land in the Dzongkhag could help towards displacing these militants from Bhutanese soil. He, therefore, requested that landless people be resettled as soon as possible in Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag.

The Samtse Chimi said that as submitted by the Samtse Dzongda, since the vacant land in Samtse Dzongkhag have turned into forest and the villages are all far-flung, the ngolops have taken advantage of the situation and have been carrying out frequent raids on the villages. He, therefore, requested for the resettlement of landless people in Samtse Dzongkhag to be expedited.

The National Assembly resolved that the Royal Government shall carry out the resettlement of landless people in accordance with the resolutions of the previous sessions of the National Assembly.

XI. MISCELLANEOUS ISSUES.

1.APPRECIATION FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW DRATSHANG.

The Bumthang Chimi submitted that people of the four valleys of Bumthang wished to express their deep appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for establishing a branch of the Trongsa Rabdey in their Dzongkhag. In response to the people's request, submitted to the 75th Session of the National Assembly, a new Dratshang had been established with one Lam and twenty one monks. The public have already started to enjoy the benefits with all necessary religious ceremonies now being performed by the new Dratshang at Jakar Dzong.

The Yangtse Chimi submitted that, although the point he wished to raise was not included in the agenda, he felt he had to seek permission to make an intervention pertaining to the wishes and aspirations of the people of his Dzongkhag. He reported that the construction of the new Dzong at Trashi Yangtse had been completed, and he now wished to remind the august body that the 75th Session of the National Assembly had passed a resolution to establish a Dratshang in the old Trashi Yangtse Dzong.

The Speaker clarified that, in accordance with the resolution of the 73rd Session, in response to the submission of the people of Trashi Yangtse, the establishment of a Dratshang in Trashi Yangtse is presently being processed by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs. The establishment of the Dratshang was postponed because maintenance work on the old Dzong, where the Drastshang will be housed, could not be undertaken until the construction of the new Dzong was completed. Now that the new Dzong has been constructed, the maintenance work on the old Dzong would be completed soon and the people and the district administration of Trashi Yangtse should work together with the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs to establish the Dratshang in accordance with the resolution of the 75th Session of the National Assembly. As such, it is not necessary to discuss the matter any further at this juncture.

Responding to the submission of the Bumthang Chimi, the Home Minister first expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King and the National Assembly for the trust and confidence reposed in him by bestowing him with the rank and post of Home Minister of Bhutan. He pledged to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with utmost sincerity through full efforts of body, speech and mind.

He recalled that the people of Bumthang had requested for a Dratshang to be established at Jakar Dzong because the Trongsa Rabdey resides in Bumthang only from the fifth to the seventh month of the Bhutanese calendar. As commanded by His Majesty the King during the 75th Session of the National Assembly, a branch of the Trongsa Rabdey, comprising one Lam and twenty one monks, was established at the Jakar Dzong. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs joins the people of Bumthang in thanking His Majesty the King for His gracious command to establish the Dratshang, he said.

Regarding the submission by the Trashi Yangtse Chimi, as already clarified by the Speaker, the establishment of a new Dratshang at Trashi Yangtse was discussed in the past session of the National Assembly but it could not be established because of the lack of accommodation for the monks. However, once the accommodations are completed, the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, the Dzongkhag administration and the people should together discuss and work out the establishment of the Dratshang at Trashi Yangtse, said the Home Minister.

The National Assembly expressed its hope and confidence that the new Dratshang at Jakar Dzong will greatly benefit the people of Bumthang by meeting their needs for the performance of various religious ceremonies. Regarding the establishment of a new Dratshang at Trashi Yangtse, the National Assembly resolved that the matter should be dealt with as recommended by the Home Minister.

2. CREATION OF NEW GEOGS.

The public of the nine geogs of Lumang, Nanong, Khaling, Phonmey, Radhi, Samkhar, Shongphug, Thrimshing and Uzurung in Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that there are between 500 to 683 households in each of these geogs. The large number of households, and the geographical layout of these geogs have posed much inconvenience to both the public and the government officials in the delivery of effective and equitable development services. In order to ensure effective delivery of development services, new geogs should be created out of the larger geogs. He reported that the matter had also been submitted to the Home Ministry vide letter no. DAT-ADM/97-98/3770 dated 27th April 1998.

The Home Minister confirmed that, as submitted by the public of Trashigang, the Ministry had received the proposal to create new geogs by splitting some of the larger geogs in the Dzongkhag. The proposal, however, needed careful study since large geogs,

both in terms of population and number of households, is a common problem in most of the 20 Dzongkhags.

Moreover, the following data and information about the existing geogs needs to be studied before any decision to establish new geogs is taken:

- land registration records
- geog demarcation on ground
- existing development facilities
- new geog facilities, if required
- DYT and GYT membership

Further, the Home Ministry has been commanded by His Majesty the King to take up the re-demarcation of Dzongkhag boundaries, which has been found to be highly incongruous for effective administration and implementation of development activities.

Any geog demarcation before the Dzongkhag re-demarcation at this stage would be ad hoc. It would disturb the budget allocations and implementation of development activities under the Eighth Plan programmes in the different geogs, all of which have been finalized only recently in the course of the public meetings held by His Majesty the King in each of the 20 Dzongkhags. The Home Minister, therefore, requested that geog re-demarcation should be considered only after the re-demarcation of Dzongkhag boundaries has been completed.

The National Assembly decided that, as recommended by the Home Minister, the creation of new geogs will be undertaken after the re-demarcations of the Dzongkhag boundaries are finalised and completed.

3. PUNISHMENT FOR DESECRATION OF RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

While opening the discussion on the punishment for offences related to the desecration of religious heritages, the Speaker reminded the members that the judiciary in Bhutan is independent, and as such, it does not come within the purview of the government or the National Assembly. That is why there is no representative of the judiciary in the National Assembly. The Speaker informed the members that since the point under discussion pertains to legal matters, he had requested the presence of the hon'ble Chief Justice, as a special invitee of the National Assembly, so that he could clarify queries from the members.

The Chimi of Samar Geog in Haa Dzongkhag submitted that increasing numbers of criminals, motivated by greed, are desecrating the precious heritage of Mahayana Buddhism and robbing precious relics, images and Zungs (sacred essence) from the Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chortens. Such criminals involved in the immoral act of destroying our precious religious heritage must be given capital punishment, he said. The Chimi also submitted that the people of Samar Geog are deeply shocked and saddened by the fire disaster at the Taktshang Monastery which was a result of a deliberate explosion by evil criminals intent on demoralising and hurting the Bhutanese people.

The Chhukha Chimi submitted that the problem of theft and desecration of monasteries and Chortens had been discussed in the 72nd Session of the National Assembly. He said that the people of Chhukha Dzongkhag feel that the provision of awarding life imprisonment for such offences has not deterred criminals from resorting to theft of religious artifacts and Nangtens (sacred religious treasures) through the desecration of our religious monuments and Lhakhangs. The destruction of a precious national treasure like the Taktshang Monastery is a case in point. Although the government and the people are doing everything possible to guard Lhakhangs and Chortens it is becoming very difficult to protect them from unscrupulous criminals. Therefore, in order to safeguard our rich religious heritage before it becomes too late, capital punishment must be awarded to all criminals desecrating and robbing our sacred religious treasures.

A Royal Advisory Councillor expressed his opinion that perhaps the number of crimes was increasing because the laws of the country are too lenient. Although the punishment for those who are involved in the desecration and robbery of religious artifacts and treasures are stated clearly in Resolution No.2 of the 72nd Session of the National Assembly, the increase in such crimes must be due to the fact that the punishment is not severe enough. Therefore, the National Assembly should resolve that a much stronger law should be framed in the interest of protecting our national heritages from further desecration and loss.

The Samtse Dzongda, the Haa Chimi and a Royal Advisory Councillor expressed their view that it is perhaps due to the desecration of our sacred religious heritages by evil criminals, motivated by consuming greed, that problems have arisen in the country at a time when it has been enjoying continued peace and happiness. As the saying goes, “if

evil is not rooted out, good will not flourish,” capital punishment must be given to all criminals involved in the robbery and desecration of our religious treasures, he said. This would be an effective deterrent to reduce the number of such evil crimes.

The Lhuentse Dzongda reminded the members that, Bhutan being a land of the Dharma, the eminent luminaries of the past had built many Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chortens all across the country. He said that criminals who rob religious objects and desecrate Chortens must be given capital punishment because that is what they deserve. However, he doubted whether the problem could be effectively dealt with by depending on the law alone. He said that “if the course of a stream is not changed at the source, it will be too late by the time it spreads and flows across the plains.” Therefore, he urged the Assembly members to reflect deeply on the best possible means and policies to protect and safeguard the country’s rich religious treasures.

The Minister for Health and Education said that the policy of the Health Division is prevention rather than cure as the saying goes, “take precautions before the illness strikes, and clear the channels before the waters come.” He said that just some years ago, he did not hear of robberies and desecration of monasteries and Chortens, but now the materialistic desires of people seem to have increased with the development of the country. Therefore, he expressed his doubt whether it would be possible to safeguard the religious treasures of the country no matter to what extent legal measures are strengthened.

The minister pointed out that enforcement of capital punishment was being discontinued in more and more countries, and expressed his skepticism about the proposal of capital punishment being enforced in cases of desecrations of Chortens and monasteries. As Bhutan is a religious country it will be inappropriate to enforce capital punishment, he said. Nor does it conform to the image of a religious country. Therefore, he urged the Assembly to look for alternative methods of punishment.

The Wangdue Phodrang Chimi said that the eminent luminaries of the past and our great forefathers have passed down a precious legacy of cherished values and customs. He said that if we are to “preserve and protect what has declined, and strengthen what is vibrant,” we must ensure that evil criminals do not desecrate and rob our rich religious treasures and heritage. He said that criminals who commit such offences must be given capital punishment or a minimum sentence of rigorous life imprisonment. The laws on this issue which were enacted in 1980 must accordingly be amended.

The Chukha Dzongda said that Bhutan is well known as a country with a rich religious and cultural heritage. The strength of our social fabric is symbolized by the sacred religious treasures in our Dzongs and monasteries. But, with the development of the country, greed has blinded many criminals, predominantly urban dwellers, who have been desecrating and robbing our religious treasures. Although many countries are trying to abolish capital punishment, it will be a good deterrent like the saying, “killing one criminal will dissuade a hundred others,” if capital punishment is given to criminals involved in the desecration and robbery of religious treasures.

A Lhuentse Chimi pointed out that criminals awarded life sentences have an easy time while serving their terms since they are allowed to have electric light in their rooms and even live with their wives. They are better off than people living in villages which have no electricity. It seems that there is no distinction between light and heavy prison sentences. Therefore, the relevant clauses in the Thrimzhung Chhenpo and the Prison Act should be reviewed and made as strict as possible.

At this point, the Chief Justice thanked the Speaker for inviting him to address the National Assembly on behalf of the Judiciary and extended his warm Tashi Delek to the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and all the members of the National Assembly.

Responding to the submissions of the people on the issue of ‘Punishment for Desecration of Religious Heritage,’ the Chief Justice pointed out that our ancestors and eminent luminaries of the past have bequeathed to us a rich heritage of invaluable religious treasures to perpetuate the Buddha-Dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings. Just as the hon’ble members are deeply disturbed by the robbery and desecration of our precious religious treasures, the judiciary is also equally disturbed by these evil acts and share the same degree of concern, he said.

The Chief Justice expressed his deep regret that despite the best efforts of the judiciary to punish the Tempis Rudras (enemies of the Dharma) in accordance with the laws enacted by the National Assembly, these shameless criminals dishonouring the country keep multiplying. He expressed his fear that if the present trend of robbery and desecration of our sacred religious treasures continued any further, a time may come when our children will not even know that such a rich and precious religious heritage ever existed, much less see them in reality.

The Chief Justice informed the members that the laws of Bhutan stem out of a harmonious combination of religious law which is like the silken knot, soft but tight, and the secular law which is like a golden yoke, heavy but impartial. Our laws embody fairness, simplicity, accessibility and wide jurisdiction under which the guilty cannot escape and the innocent is not convicted, he said. However, with the changes in time, more and more criminals threaten the society. The Chief Justice, therefore, appreciated that the 76th Session of the National Assembly was deliberating on the issue of punishment for desecration of religious treasures and heritage. He pointed out that the National Assembly, aware of the risk to the strength of the Dharma being eroded by the theft and desecration of religious treasures, had supplemented Section Tha 1-9 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo with the following additional clause:

Any person/persons committing an act of theft and robbery of Ku-Sung-Thukten from a private or a government owned Lhakhang or Goenkhang shall be sentenced to life imprisonment.

He informed the members that while dealing with cases of theft and desecration of Ku-Sung-Thukten, the Courts have awarded punishment without any exception for each and every offence strictly in accordance with the law. He reminded them that the responsibility of the judges is to conduct trials according to the law and convict the guilty and acquit the innocent, free from fear or favour in discharging their duty.

The Chief Justice recalled that most of the Assembly members had repeatedly quoted the saying ‘elimination of one life can benefit a hundred lives’ and strongly called for the enforcement of capital punishment. He pointed out that Section Tha 1-12 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo clearly states that a person who has already been convicted once for committing theft of religious treasures and desecration of Lhakhangs or Chortens, and repeats the crime again, shall be punished with capital punishment. Therefore, there is no need for any amendment or supplement to the existing law on this issue.

The Chief Justice pointed out that even the Dharma stresses the importance of an exhaustive hearing during trials before awarding any punishment. He, therefore, requested the hon’ble members to analyze the issue thoroughly while deliberating on it. He said that, as the members have pointed out, our country is a land where the values and teachings of the Dharma are respected and followed by the King, ministers and the people. Therefore, when we claim that ours is a religious country, we must cultivate the four immeasurable qualities (compassion, tolerance, love and affection) and have compassion and tolerance towards all sentient beings as this is the essence of Dharma. He

pointed out that the Enlightened Buddha himself had said that while the offence must be punished, there must be compassion for the offender. He, therefore, requested the hon'ble members not to go against this principle if we wish the land of the Palden Drukpa to be known as a country of the Buddha-Dharma.

The Chief Justice assured the members that their concerns and doubts on the issue will be addressed by the Judiciary through Section DA 1-5 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo, which states:

“The judge shall decide cases and award punishment strictly in accordance with the provisions of the law. He shall not allow himself to be swayed by any personal opinions while interpreting the provisions of law.”

The Chief Justice reminded the members that even under natural justice, no person is convicted without a full hearing and until the charges against the accused are proven and supported by witnesses or documentary evidences. He informed the members that according to DA 1-7:

“The Thrimkhang shall not convict any person without a full hearing and until the charges against the accused are proven and supported by witnesses or documentary evidences. No person shall be convicted on the basis of suspicion, doubt or hearsay.”

Following the explanation given by the Chief Justice on the laws pertaining to punishment for desecration and theft of Ku-Sung- Thuktens, a Royal Advisory Councillor said that all the people in Bhutan are concerned by the constant theft and robbery of our religious treasures because the desecration of our sacred religious heritage can lead to misfortunes for the country. It is unfortunate that these evil criminals have resorted to theft of religious treasures as a short cut to acquiring wealth which they envy in others who have acquired them through their merits and hard work. He submitted that while the laws should be strengthened to prevent the further loss of our religious treasures, the hon'ble members should not think of changing or amending the existing laws because, as clarified by the Chief Justice, criminals desecrating and robbing religious treasures should be given capital punishment or life imprisonment in strict accordance with the laws of the country.

The Punakha Chimi expressed his concern that the continued theft and desecration of our religious treasures will lead to the erosion of the blessings emanating from the strength of the Dharma. Therefore, even if it is not possible to mete out more severe punishment under the law, criminals sentenced to life imprisonment for theft and desecration of religious treasures must be made to serve their sentences very rigorously.

In response, the Home Minister agreed that inspite of the efforts made by both the government and the public to protect our religious and cultural heritage, there has been an increase in the number of thefts and desecrations of our religious treasures. As of June 1998, a total of 118 Lhakhangs and 911 Chhortens have been desecrated and robbed.

In view of the great importance and need to protect our sacred religious and cultural heritage, His Majesty the King had issued a Kasho on 28th February 1993, requiring identification of appropriate caretakers for the Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chhortens in all the Dzongkhags. The owners of Lhakhangs and Goendeys, as well as the caretakers appointed by the District Development Committees for public Lhakhangs and Goendeys, are exempted from Shabto-Lemi.

As per the royal command, the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs was established in 1995 to consolidate and strengthen Bhutan's unique cultural and spiritual traditions, to complete inventory and photographic documentation of cultural sites, monuments and articles of antique value, to restore monuments and sites, and prevent them from deterioration, to preserve the ancient documents and literature, to develop existing cultural centres and institutions, and to promote the 13 traditional arts and crafts (Zorig Chusum). The Special Commission is making every effort to implement the command of His Majesty the King and the policy of the Royal Government in protecting our religious and cultural heritage, said the Home Minister.

However, when it comes to awarding of punishment for desecration of our religious treasures, we must be guided by the laws of the land. In this regard, the relevant laws enacted in 1980 are adequate for dealing with criminals desecrating and robbing the religious treasures, and there is no need to change these laws for the time being.

A Royal Advisory Councillor regretted the fact that despite the efforts and measures taken by the government and people, thefts of religious treasures have been increasing every year. The desecration and robbery of sacred religious treasures and the murder of caretakers by these enemies of the Dharma have caused unbearable concern among the

people. Therefore, he requested that all the members should be given ample opportunity to express their views on this issue.

He thanked the Hon'ble Chief Justice for clarifying that the punishment for crimes related to the desecration and robbery of religious treasures are covered under Tha-1.9 to Tha-1.12, Da-1.5 and Da - 1.8 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo. However, he felt that the application of the law has been very lenient. Citing a saying, "a single measure of wheat as portage charge will suffice for the people of Tsento, and a single measure of wheat for dances performed by the people of Paga," he said that punishment for desecration and theft of religious treasures are being awarded under Tha.1.9 regardless of the magnitude of the offences. That is why such crimes have been on the rise. He suggested that if capital punishment is not awarded under Tha 1.12 for such crimes, life imprisonment under Tha 1.9 must be made as rigorous as possible.

The Thimphu Chimi reminded the house that Bhutan is a land of the Dharma and, therefore, capital punishment, although covered under the law, has not been implemented in the country. Although life imprisonment is an appropriate alternative for capital punishment, it is essential that the prisoners should be made to serve their sentences rigorously.

The Speaker reminded the members that the Hon'ble Chief Justice had explained the legal provisions regarding punishment for desecration and theft of religious treasures. The Home Minister had also reported about the preventive measures taken by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs in keeping with His Majesty the King's command. He said that these measures would address the concerns expressed by the hon'ble members and, therefore, a prolonged discussion on the issue is not necessary.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Chimis of Wangdue Phodrang, Lhuentse, Punakha, Thimphu, Bumthang and Chukha Dzongkhags expressed their views and suggestions on the issue one after another. They pointed out that the practice of awarding capital punishment is being discontinued in other countries. If it is enforced in Bhutan it would tarnish Bhutan's image as a land of the Dharma. They said that capital punishment is not desirable but clarified that their objection did not arise out of concerns regarding human rights issues but because it will not be in keeping with the teachings and values of the Buddha-Dharma.

They said that in the glorious past, many of the Lhakhangs and Goendeys were the seats of eminent Lams and religious luminaries. The prayers and offerings by them blessed the surrounding land resulting in bounteous harvests of agricultural produce, free from damage by wild animals or bad weather. However, the output from the agricultural activities of the people in the rural areas, at present, is not in proportion to the intensive input and effort or the fertility of the soil. This is probably due to the dissipation of the blessings and aura of the sacred religious treasures and heritages which are being increasingly desecrated and looted in recent years. They pointed out that such crimes are being committed by criminals who had already served prison terms for similar offences. Therefore, it must be ensured that a person convicted for desecrating and robbing religious treasures is imprisoned for life.

Some of the members observed that the actual desecrations and robbery of religious treasures are mostly carried out by ordinary people who have been manipulated and paid to commit these crimes by wealthier people. Since there is every risk that, at this rate, the religious treasures of the country could vanish like a dream, all persons involved in the desecration and theft of Ku-Sung-Thugtens should be punished very severely.

Some Chimis noted that if a person is convicted of robbing and desecrating religious treasures for a second time, he deserves to be given capital punishment under Tha 1.12. However, because Bhutan is a land of the Dharma, there is no record of capital punishment being awarded in the country. Our own conscience would also go against the imposition of capital punishment. On the other hand, it has become imperative to ensure that life imprisonment must be awarded and imposed very strictly.

Other Chimis recalled that in 1992 and 1993, several persons were convicted for stealing religious artifacts from Lingshi Dzong. During their imprisonment these criminals lived as they wished, without following prison regulations and showing total disregard for the prison guards, and subsequently all of them escaped from prison. The Chimis suggested that from henceforth, prisoners serving life sentences should not be allowed to serve their sentences under such easy and lax conditions.

Some Chimis noted that the Hon'ble Chief Justice had explained that sections Tha 1.9 and Tha 1.12 were applicable for criminals involved in the desecration and robbery of sacred religious treasures. As seventeen years had passed since these clauses were enacted, they requested the Hon'ble Chief Justice to apprise the members on how many times sections

Tha 1.9 and Tha 1.12 had been applied, and the impact that the application of these two sections had on the incidence of such offences.

While commending the hon'ble members of the National Assembly for their concern on the cases of desecration and theft of religious treasures, the Chief Justice expressed his concern over the request by the legislature (National Assembly) for a report on the judgments of the Courts which, he said, was contrary to the principle of independence of the judiciary. He pointed out that according to the provisions of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo, which was enacted by the 12th Session of the National Assembly, the Judiciary is independent of the legislative and executive branches of the government.

The Chief Justice reiterated that the responsibility of the Courts is to hear and decide cases in accordance with Sections Da 1-1 and Da 1-2 of the Thrimzhung Chhenpo while the responsibility of the National Assembly is to enact laws. Therefore, it is not the responsibility of the National Assembly to review the judgements of the Courts. Likewise, while it is the responsibility of the Courts to hear and decide cases, keeping in mind the concern and views of the members of the Assembly, they do not make laws.

The Chief Justice reminded the members that notwithstanding the present request by the hon'ble members for a report on the judgements of the Courts, His Majesty the King and the Hon'ble Speaker had time and again emphasized the independence of the judiciary. He explained that the concept of independence of the judiciary implies that if any aggrieved person is not satisfied by the judgement of a Court, only the appellate Court may review the judgement and no other body, including the National Assembly, can question or review the Court's judgement.

Similarly, on the issue of certain rights and basic requisites provided to prisoners serving their sentences, the Chief Justice cautioned the members that since the Prison Act of Bhutan is both enduring and sound in principle, any attempt to amend it may diminish its efficiency.

Concluding his clarifications on the issue, the Chief Justice reminded the hon'ble members that since the National Assembly of Bhutan has the full authority to enact and amend laws, it should make sure that any new law enacted is enduring, convenient and appreciable, and also conforms to the provision of Kadyon Ka which requires that "a secular law should be immutable, strict, authoritative and firm."

The Bumthang Chimi pointed out that, as the members are all aware, the judiciary in Bhutan is independent. He said that the request by some Chimis for the judgement of the Courts to be reported to the National Assembly might undermine the independence of the judiciary which had been declared during the 12th Session of the National Assembly itself. Furthermore, His Majesty the King had also issued a royal command that the judiciary is fully independent.

He said that, instead of making changes and amendments, it would be better to entrust the judiciary and the Royal Bhutan Police with the responsibility of interpreting and implementing the law. He pointed out that many countries have amended their laws, in keeping with the times, to abolish past provisions for extreme forms of punishment. Bhutan is a small country with a small population, and also a land of the Dharma. Therefore, there is no need to deliberate on increasing the punishments which are already given very clearly under the existing laws.

On behalf of the National Assembly, a Royal Advisory Councillor thanked the Chief Justice for explaining the legal statutes in detail. He observed that there has been increasing thefts and desecrations of religious treasures. The concerns expressed by the hon'ble members, he said, is not a consequence of their doubts and misgivings about the performance of the judiciary. He explained that the members are only keen to find better ways of curbing the commission of crimes by amending some provisions of the law. Justice, he acknowledged, is the root for national peace and happiness. He humbly noted that the faithful execution of justice demands ingenuity and impartiality. He said that if justice is enforced vigorously, the number of criminals would gradually decrease. He, therefore, urged the judiciary to enforce justice very rigorously.

The Speaker noted that the sacred religious treasures of the country are vital for ensuring that the Dharma of Lord Buddha continues to flourish in Bhutan. He said that the Assembly has held a prolonged deliberation calling for capital punishment to be given to all criminals involved in the desecration and theft of religious treasures and heritages because of the rising incidence of such crimes. He recalled that when legislations were enacted in the previous sessions of the National Assembly careful consideration had been given to their relevance and application for the present as well as the future. He said that the 72nd Session of the National Assembly had held a detailed discussion on the theft and desecration of religious treasures. It was resolved then that punishments related to such crimes would be awarded by the judiciary in accordance to the provisions of the

Thrimzhung Chhenpo. Nine different measures had been decided upon to increase the safety and security of Chortens and Lhakhangs. Furthermore, His Majesty the King had also issued a Kasho to reinforce these measures, and caretakers and persons guarding Lhakhangs and Chortens have been exempted from Shabto-Lemi.

The Speaker said that the deliberations on the issue made him wonder whether all concerned persons and parties had not been somewhat lax in implementing the commands of His Majesty the King and the resolutions of the National Assembly. Regarding punishment for criminals involved in the desecration and theft of religious treasures, it should suffice if the judiciary could keep in mind the concerns raised by the hon'ble members while dealing with the cases in accordance with the provisions of the law.

The National Assembly noted that the increasing thefts and desecration of religious treasures and heritages is a source of deep concern for both the government and the people. The trial and punishment of criminals involved in the desecration and robbery of religious treasures should continue to be conducted and awarded in keeping with the provisions of the law. At the same time, all concerned should faithfully implement the commands of His Majesty the King and the resolutions of the 72nd Session of the National Assembly to safeguard and protect the religious treasures contained in the Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chortens in the Kingdom.

4. STRENGTHENING OF SECURITY IN SACRED MONASTERIES

The people of Bumthang submitted that they were greatly shocked and grieved by the fire disaster at Taktshang monastery, one of the most sacred Lhakhangs blessed by Guru Rimpoche. There are several other sacred Lhakhangs like Paro Kyichu, Kurje, Jampel Lhakhang, Dechenphu, Tango and Cheri Monastery. Therefore, the people wished to submit that the government should appoint additional caretakers or security personnel to protect the sacred monasteries of the country before it is too late.

Likewise, the Gyenshari Chimi in Punakha Dzongkhag expressed the deep concern of the people over the grave incident of the fire at Paro Taktshang. He submitted that there is an urgent need to strengthen security in all the sacred Lhakhangs and Goendeys where there are precious religious treasures. In order to preserve and protect the rich cultural and national heritages of the country it is necessary for the government to consider posting armed security personnel to guard our sacred monasteries, he said. Another alternative

would be to start Shedras and Lobdras in the important Lhakhangs and Goendeys as this will, to a certain extent, provide security.

Before making his response, the Home Minister requested for the Royal Kasho issued in 1993 by His Majesty the King, to strengthen the security of our sacred monasteries, to be read out to the hon'ble members of the National Assembly.

After the Royal Kasho was read out by the National Assembly Secretary, the Home Minister noted that the issues raised by the Bumthang Chimi and Gyenshari Chimi concerned the need to strengthen the security of our sacred monasteries by posting armed security guards, appointing additional caretakers or establishing Shedras and Lobdras in the monasteries.

The Home Minister said that these concerns of the people were well appreciated and coincided with the policies of the Royal Government. On behalf of the Special Commission, he reported on some of the measures the Commission had so far taken up in line with the Royal Kasho of 1993 to prevent the loss of sacred religious artifacts. In order to protect the sacred religious treasures of the country, the Special Commission has completed the inventory of religious artifacts in 1,988 out of a total of approximately 2,000 Lhakhangs across the country. These are well documented and include photographic records which are being compiled to further strengthen the records of our religious treasures, he said.

Caretakers have the main responsibility of ensuring the security of the religious artifacts in our Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chortens. Training of caretakers have been initiated in order to sensitize them on the need to protect valuable Ku-Sung-Thuktens in our monasteries. One such training session is scheduled for September-October this year. A total of 88 monks and Gomchens have already been trained on three separate occasions on how to maintain proper records and inspect the Ku-Sung-Thuktens.

Further, in order to actively involve the members of each local community, the concerned Gups, Mangi Aps and caretakers are included as members of the committee for compiling and maintaining the inventory of the Ku-Sung-Thuktens in their respective geogs.

A special task force comprising students from the Royal Polytechnic at Deothang and school teachers have been recruited to record the existing conditions of Lhakhangs and Goendeys. This is being done to determine the existing conditions of the Lhakhangs and

Goendeys, prioritize their restoration programme, and preserve the historical sketches of the Lhakhangs in case of any unfortunate loss through fire.

The Home Minister reminded the members that the 72nd Session of the National Assembly had also discussed the need to strengthen the security of the Lhakhangs and Goendeys and had directed the concerned communities in the geogs to ensure the security of the Chortens and Lhakhangs in their respective areas. This was further reinforced by the Royal Kasho which has been read out to the National Assembly.

The Home Minister informed the members that all the 911 Chortens which had been desecrated and robbed of their Zungs have been renovated with new Zungs installed, and duly consecrated with the assistance of the Central Monk Body.

His Majesty the King has also issued directives that all the Dzongkhags and Rabdeys should review the security needs of their respective Lhakhangs and Goendeys and identify the more sacred and important Lhakhangs and Goendeys which are in urgent need of stronger security, and submit such a list to the Special Commission. Moreover, two months back the Chairman of the Special Commission had empowered the Dratshang and the concerned Dzongdas to appoint additional caretakers for the Lhakhangs and Goendeys according to the need determined by them. The Central Monk Body also discusses the security of important Lhakhangs on a regular basis with the Netens of the Rabdeys in the different Dzongkhags.

The Home Minister agreed with the proposal of the Bumthang Chimi and the Gyenshari Chimi to establish Shedras and Lobdras in some of the selected Lhakhangs and Goendays. He informed the members that the security of important monasteries like Tangu, Cheri, Seola, Dongkala, Bjela Tshochagsa and Tsamda Gompa have been strengthened by establishing Shedras and Lobdas.

However, he said, the National Assembly should seriously reconsider the proposal to post armed security guards in the Lhakhangs and Goendeys. One or two persons will not be sufficient to provide adequate security. There are over 2,000 Lhakhangs and Goendeys in the country and it will not be feasible to mobilize so many security guards and provide them with arms and accommodation. However, an appropriate determination will be made by the Royal Government on ensuring proper security for the important Lhakhangs in the country after the list of important Lhakhangs and Goendeys which require urgent security are received from the Dzongkhags and Rabdeys, said the Home Minister.

The Thimphu Chimi submitted that, in keeping with His Majesty the King's Kasho on the protection of Lhakhangs in the villages, the caretakers have been exempted from all community works and obligations so that they can devote themselves fully to looking after the Lhakhangs. Furthermore, the people in the localities have not been leaving everything to the caretakers but have also been helping them to protect the Lhakhangs.

He said that the Lhakhangs and Goendeys which are far away from the villages need better security, because there are no people praying and meditating in these places, as in the past. The establishment of small religious institutions in such Lhakhangs would not only help to improve security but the daily prayers and offerings conducted by them will be beneficial for the country.

The Speaker reminded the members that the queries raised by the members have been answered by the Home Minister. The Special Commission for Cultural Affairs which has been working according to His Majesty the King's Kasho has been compiling inventories of the religious treasures in all the Dzongkhags, and also reviewing the problems and situation in all the Lhakhangs and Goendeys. Therefore, it should suffice if the Special Commission is allowed to complete these works after which it should take a decision on the best course of action to improve the security of the Lhakhangs and Goendeys.

The Haa Chimi suggested that retired army personnel in the concerned villages and geogs should be hired and issued firearms to protect the Lhakhangs and Goendeys. He said that if timely measures are not taken there is every possibility that our precious religious treasures will soon be lost forever from the country.

He pointed out that, since some time back, the responsibility of protecting the Lhakhangs, Goendeys and Chortens have been entrusted to the District Development Committees and the Block Development Committees. Since the Special Commission is reviewing and studying the situation, in accordance with His Majesty's Kasho, the District Development Committees and the Block Development Committees should convene Zomdus (meetings) on the problems faced in protecting the religious heritages in their areas and submit their reports to the Special Commission. This would be very beneficial for determining the best means of protecting the rich religious treasures and heritages of our country.

The Trongsa Chimi said that many religious monuments and heritages containing sacred religious treasures had been built by the eminent luminaries of the past. With the changes in time these religious heritages are being desecrated and robbed by sinful people. While

nothing can be done about the damage inflicted so far, from now onwards, we should keep in mind the saying, “take necessary precautions before the illness strikes, clear the channels before the waters come,” and strengthen the measures for protecting our Lhakhangs and Goendeys. He reminded the hon’ble members that there are many sacred Lhakhangs and religious monuments in the country like Jambel Lhakhang, Kurji Lhakhang, Paro Kyichu Lhakhang, Gonphu Kora Chorten, Chorten Kora and Chendebji Chorten.

He also submitted that the Lhakhangs and Goendays which are located in the villages can be protected without much problem by following the provisions of the Kasho issued by His Majesty the King in 1993. However, he requested the government to make necessary arrangements to protect Lhakhangs and Goendeys which are located more than two to three kilometres away from the villages. He realised that, as pointed out by the Home Minister, there are more than 2,000 Lhakhangs and Chortens in the country. He was not suggesting that armed security personnel should be provided for all these religious heritages but only that the most important and sacred Lhakhangs and monuments, containing rich religious treasures, should be provided with adequate security.

The Bumthang Dzongda submitted that although he does not question the response given by the Home Minister and the steps taken by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs, he felt that it will take some time for the Special Commission to complete its inventories and review the problems and situation in the Lhakhangs and Goendeys. The loss of the sacred Taktshang monastery by fire had greatly alarmed and grieved the people of Bumthang. He pointed out that there are many precious and sacred Lhakhangs like Paro Kyichu Monastery and the Jambel Lhakhang in Bumthang which cannot be left unprotected. While the Special Commission is completing its inventories and review of the problems, interim measures to safeguard these national treasures must be taken. He said that while there are caretakers, known as Kangjups and Dzongpons, in all the numerous Lhakhangs in Bumthang, it is difficult for a single caretaker to keep an effective watch when hundreds of tourists and other visitors come to see the Lhakhangs. There is a need for additional caretakers to be appointed, he said. Although the Dzongkhag administration has been doing its best to ensure the protection of the Lhakhangs, it has been observed that among the responsibilities of the caretaker, such as safeguarding the Lhakhangs against fire, guarding against the robbery of religious treasures is the most difficult task, not least because of the increasing number of tourists and people visiting the Lhakhangs.

The National Assembly noted the importance attached by all concerned to the strengthening of security for the sacred Lhakhangs and Goendeys and the measures to this end which are being taken by the Special Commission under the guidance of His Majesty the King. The National Assembly decided that the Dzongkhag administrations and the Rabdeys in all the Dzongkhags must faithfully carry out their responsibilities in safeguarding the rich religious heritages of the country. For its part, the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs should keep in mind the submissions made by the Assembly members for increasing the number of caretakers and establishing Shedras and Lobdras in important monasteries, and after studying the proposals, take suitable action without delay.

5. ESTABLISHMENT OF CULTURAL TRUST FUND

The people of Bumthang Dzongkhag said that Bhutan is fortunate to have many sacred Dzongs and monasteries which our forefathers and the eminent luminaries of the past have constructed. Every effort has been made by the Royal Government to maintain and renovate these important national heritages. However, the very large number of important Dzongs and monasteries in the country, and the limited budget available, makes it difficult to maintain them properly. The people of Bumthang, therefore, proposed that a Cultural Trust Fund like the Bhutan Trust Fund for the Environment and the Health Trust Fund should be established and managed by the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs to ensure a sustainable system of maintaining and renovating these important national heritages.

The Home Minister responded by saying that the proposal of the Bumthang Chimi to establish a Cultural Trust Fund is fully in keeping with the policy of the Royal Government. His Majesty has already commanded the Special Commission for Cultural Affairs to establish a Cultural Trust Fund so that with such a fund it will be possible to look after our important national heritages on a sustainable basis.

The Home Minister informed the members that, as commanded by His Majesty the King, a draft Royal Charter for a Cultural Heritage Fund has already been framed and is ready for submission to His Majesty. According to the draft Royal Charter a minimum amount of US\$ 10 million will be invested for the Cultural Trust Fund. It will be managed by a Board of Directors comprising six members along with a Member Secretary. The draft Royal Charter also spells out in detail all the terms and conditions for operating the Fund.

Only the interest from the Cultural Trust Fund will be utilized for maintaining and renovating our monasteries and Dzongs with the capital remaining intact.

The Royal Government has started negotiations with potential donors to the Cultural Trust Fund. The Home Minister said that he was happy to report that there have been positive responses from many donors about contributing to the Cultural Trust Fund and thereby help Bhutan to preserve and promote its unique cultural heritage.

Speaking on the proposal for starting a Cultural Trust Fund, the Minister for Health and Education informed the National Assembly on the initiatives taken by his ministry to establish a Health Trust Fund, as commanded by His Majesty the King. He said that the primary objective of the Health Trust Fund is to fulfill His Majesty's aspiration of providing free medicines and vaccines to the people of the country on a perpetual basis, particularly keeping in the mind the poorer segments of our population. Presently, 40 percent of the total Health budget is being utilized on medicines and vaccines. The Royal Government contributes 80 percent of the total expenses on medicines from its own resources. The objective of the Health Trust Fund is to raise US\$ 24 million. This amount would be invested and the proceeds of the investment would be used to purchase the required medicines and vaccines. Out of the US\$ 24 million, US\$ 12 million would be raised through international and bilateral assistance, and the other US\$ 12 million would be the contribution of the Royal Government. The Health Trust Fund is, therefore, a unique concept of the recipient matching dollar for dollar the contribution made by the donors. The minister informed the National Assembly that US\$ 3.400 million has already been raised. He was hopeful that the Health Trust Fund will be successfully established and His Majesty the King's vision for sustainable development in the Health Sector will be realized.

On the same lines, the minister fully supported the establishment of a Cultural Trust Fund. This, he said, would have a positive impact on the renovation, construction, and restoration of Dzongs, Lhakhangs and the protection of our rich and priceless national heritages. He said that the strength of the Cultural Trust Fund should not be based on outside assistance only but also on donations from within. If every Bhutanese with deepest reverence and devotion donated just one Ngultrum, it would be more valuable than the thousands received from outside.

The Thimphu Chimi thanked the Minister for Health and Education for explaining the Health Trust Fund and expressed his deep appreciation for its establishment. He pointed out that the most important asset of a country is to have healthy citizens. He said that the government continues to provide essential health services to the people, incurring heavy expenditure in the process. If such an initiative like the Health Trust Fund, to ensure free health services for the people, is realized its benefits will be immeasurable. Likewise, His Majesty the King had commanded the establishment of a Cultural Trust Fund. He prayed that His Majesty's command will be fulfilled for the benefit of the Bhutanese people.

The Haa Chimi appreciated the immense significance of establishing a Cultural Trust Fund as suggested by the people of Bumthang. He said that the people are indeed fortunate that His Majesty the King has already commanded the establishment of a Cultural Trust Fund and the framing of a Royal Charter for the Fund even before the proposal was conceived and submitted by the people.

He expressed his appreciation to the government for deciding to establish a Cultural Trust Fund in order to preserve Bhutan's rich religious and cultural heritage. He also noted that the people will have the opportunity of contributing to the Fund according to their income level. He said that the merits of the good deeds through individual contributions will certainly last for a long time. The contributions made with devotion and prayers will be all the more meritorious. He pointed out that if the people of the different geogs are informed by their respective Chimis about the Cultural Trust Fund, they will be greatly encouraged and will be happy to contribute to such a worthy venture. Pointing out that such a initiative is very unique, he urged the ministers and senior government officials to renew their efforts to ensure the establishment of the Cultural Trust Fund.

A Royal Advisory Councillor said that both the Cultural Trust Fund suggested by the people of Bumthang and the Health Trust Fund will be immensely beneficial. Therefore, if steps are taken to collect contributions from the people, the business community and private sector corporations it will help to fulfill the noble objective of establishing these two Trust Funds.

The Speaker reminded the members that the Home Minister had informed the house that His Majesty the King had already commanded the establishment of a Cultural Trust Fund and that a draft Royal Charter for a Cultural Heritage Fund had also been framed. Since

potential donors had also responded positively about contributing to the Fund there is no need to prolong the discussion. Regarding contribution from within the country, the Speaker said that there is no need to work out any modalities for collecting such contributions which should always be made as per the wishes and means of the individuals concerned.

The National Assembly thanked His Majesty the King for having already issued a royal command for the establishment of a Cultural Trust Fund and the steps already taken to establish the Fund. While the Chimis should inform the people of their constituencies about the proposed establishment of the Cultural Trust Fund they should keep in mind that it is not the policy of the Royal Government to collect contributions from the people. Any contributions to the Cultural Trust Fund from the people, business community and private sector corporations should be made entirely according to their wishes and their sense of commitment and devotion in preserving the country's rich cultural heritage. The discussion concluded with the members expressing their hope and prayer for the successful establishment of the Cultural Trust Fund.

6. MEASURES TO PREVENT THE LOSS OF SACRED RELIGIOUS ARTIFACTS

The Punakha Chimi submitted that in the event an important and sacred Lhakhang or monument is desecrated and robbed, concerted efforts should be made to recover the lost religious treasures. The Chimi suggested that one way to promote this objective would be to have all vehicles, whether privately owned or belonging to the government or to other organizations, properly checked at the various checkpoints by the concerned authorities.

The Home Minister noted that the Punakha Chimi had proposed that all vehicles should be thoroughly checked at the checkpoints and that the checks should apply uniformly to all vehicles whether privately owned or belonging to the government. He said that the personnel of the Registration Division and the Department of Revenue and Customs continue to check all the vehicles. In fact, all the stolen antiques and religious artifacts recovered so far are due to the conscientious performance of their duties by these personnel. He informed the members that only military vehicles are exempted from being checked and that it is mandatory for all other vehicles to be checked at the various checkpoints.

The Punakha Chimi acknowledged the briefing given by the Home Minister. He said that his submission did not imply that the people were complaining of any discrimination in the checking of vehicles. It was only being pointed out that, since not all people think alike these days, there are chances that religious artifacts could be smuggled in the vehicles which are exempted from being checked at the checkposts. He, therefore, wondered whether it could be possible to check all vehicles without any exception. He pointed out that gold had been smuggled through the Druk Air and investigations had revealed that some of the Druk Air Staff, who should all be beyond suspicion, were actually involved as accomplices of the smugglers.

Therefore, there is every chance that vehicles exempted from being checked at the checkposts could also be used by smugglers of contraband items. He said that the people would be grateful if all vehicles, military or civil, could be checked. The people deeply appreciated all the measures taken upto now at the checkposts and requested that checks should be made even more strict in the future

The National Assembly decided that in order to strengthen the measures to prevent the loss of sacred religious artifacts, the Ministry of Home Affairs should review the existing system of checking vehicles at the various checkposts. Keeping in mind the submission of the people of Punakha for all vehicles, whether privately owned or belonging to government organizations, to be checked without exception, the Home Ministry should come up with an efficient mechanism for checking the vehicles passing through the various checkposts.

7. ESTABLISHMENT OF SEPARATE GEOG OF GOSHING

The Chimi of Ngangla Geog under Panbang Dungkhag in Zhemgang Dzongkhag submitted that Ngangla Geog has 529 households and it is the biggest geog in Zhemgang, both in terms of population and area. The rugged terrain poses great difficulty for the Gup and civil servants to cover each and every village to implement and monitor developmental activities. The village of Goshing is located at a distance of two to three-days walk from the geog centre at Panbang and it has six Geog Tshogpas and 194 households. He said that it is highly inconvenient for the people of Goshing to visit the Gup's office for geog related works. The people, therefore, requested that Goshing should be created into a separate geog to alleviate the problems faced by them.

The Thimphu Chimi submitted that it is important for the government to give serious consideration to this issue. He said that whatever the number of households a geog may

have, its geographical spread should also be considered. He pointed out that although the number of households in some geogs are large, the difficulties and inconveniences for the Gups and the people are not so severe. However, some geogs having less households face severe difficulties because it takes days to travel from one village to another. He, therefore, urged the National Assembly to look into these problems and hardships faced by the concerned Gups, Chimis and the people while considering the question of creating new geogs.

The Home Minister pointed out that a similar request has been submitted by the public of Trashigang and discussed in the National Assembly. He said that the establishment of any new geog or re-demarcating the boundary of existing geogs, before the re-demarcation of Dzongkhag boundaries, will only disturb the implementation of the Eighth Plan programmes. The Minister proposed that the creation of new geogs should be considered only after the re-demarcation of the Dzongkhag boundaries are completed.

The Minister for Health and Education said that, on the command of His Majesty the King, he had undertaken a long tour covering the remotest parts of Zhemgang Dzongkhag. The tour also covered areas of Ngangla and Goshing. The minister said that it took 12 hours walk from Ngangla to Goshing, and in between there was not even water to drink. The minister, while supporting the proposal for establishing of separate Goshing Geog, said that the establishment of new geogs should not be dependent on the population factor alone but other aspects like terrain and the size of the area must also be taken into consideration.

The Zhemgang Dzongda said that Ngangla Geog is one of the biggest geogs in Zhemgang. He informed the members that the distance between the geog centre at Panbang and Goshing is about two days walk. Moreover, he said that the people are scattered in sparse settlements separated from each other by rivers and rocky cliffs. Every year, floods in summer seriously disrupt all movement causing great hardships to the people.

He further mentioned that even if Goshing is made into a separate geog, it would not require community development facilities to be established since agriculture and animal husbandry centres, a Basic Health Unit and a school were already established in the area. The request for a separate geog in Goshing has been made only because of the long distance between the Ngangla Geog Centre and Goshing Village which has been causing much inconvenience and hardship for the people. He said that the creation of a new geog

would also facilitate the strengthening of security by checking the movement of people including Bodo and ULFA militants.

The Home Minister agreed that Goshing is very large in area. However, if the National Assembly decides to create new geogs at this juncture it may impede the implementation of developmental activities and programmes. Moreover, similar requests from other Dzongkhags will also have to be considered. Therefore, it will be better for the re-demarcation of Dzongkhag boundaries to be completed first. The creation of new geogs and the merging or separation of existing geogs should all be considered together at a later date.

The Haa Chimi and a Royal Advisory Councillor submitted that the need for Goshing to be made into a separate geog is very genuine in view of its difficult location and security consideration. They recommended that the issue should be decided during the current session itself both for the convenience of the Dzongkhag administration and to alleviate the difficulties faced by the people.

His Majesty the King advised the National Assembly that it is important to first finalize the boundary demarcation of the 20 Dzongkhags because there are many problems with their existing boundaries. For example, Lobesa is under Thimphu Dzongkhag but it takes two and a half hours drive to reach from Thimphu while it is only a five minute drive from Wangdue Phodrang Dzong. Similarly, the villages on the way from Chhuzom to Haa are within Paro Dzongkhag while Wanakha is under Chukha Dzongkhag. Haa Dzongkhag's boundary, along the highway to Chhuzom, is only 17 kilometers from Haa Dzong. As the hon'ble members are aware, similar problems are faced in all the other Dzongkhags.

The re-demarcation of the Dzongkhag boundaries will take at least two to three years because the issue will have to be discussed in the respective District Development Committees and subsequently in the National Assembly. The new Dzongkhag boundaries will have to be decided by taking into account the population density, geographical size, and benefits to the people in terms of accessibility to development centres.

Recalling that the people had requested for Goshing to be established as a separate geog from Ngangla, during the Eighth Plan meeting in Zhemgang, His Majesty said that it is necessary to properly assess the difficulties faced by the people of Goshing.

His Majesty pointed out that the existing Dzongkhag boundaries had been drawn up many years ago. The Dzongkhag administrations and the Home Ministry will have to take into consideration the size of the Dzongkhags, the problems of the people and implementation of development activities while deciding on the Dzongkhag boundaries. If the sequence of work is disrupted at this stage, it will not be possible to carry out a proper re-demarcation of the Dzongkhag boundaries. Once the boundaries of the respective Dzongkhags are decided, the mergings of smaller geogs and the separation of bigger geogs into smaller geogs can also be decided in the National Assembly.

His Majesty pointed out that disturbing the configuration of geogs at this stage, when the Eighth Five-Year Plan has just been finalized, will create problems in the implementation of development programmes. All existing facilities like schools, health centres, and agriculture and animal husbandry centres had been built to cover the people of the respective geogs. If geogs are separated and regrouped, just one year after the Eighth Plan has started, there will be serious problems in the distribution of the existing development service facilities.

Nevertheless, Goshing is located at a very considerable distance from Ngangla and it also faces problems from the intrusion by Bodo and ULFA militants. Therefore, taking into account the hardships faced by the large population of Goshing, both in the implementation of development activities and the potential security problem in the area, it would be very beneficial for the people of Goshing if it is made into a new geog as a temporary solution, His Majesty said.

The Chimi of Ngangla Geog expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for establishing Goshing as a separate geog.

The National Assembly noted that the boundaries of the Dzongkhags and geogs had remained unchanged since long time back and both the government and the people faced problems in ensuring effective coverage and implementation of development activities. Therefore, the Home Ministry and the concerned Dzongkhags should re-demarcate the Dzongkhag boundaries in keeping with His Majesty the King's command. The National Assembly decided that Goshing shall be established as a separate geog as a temporary measure until the re-demarcation of Dzongkhag boundaries is completed and the geog boundaries are subsequently finalized.

8. TENURE FOR GUPS AND CHIMIS

The Chimi of Chang Geog in Thimphu Dzongkhag submitted that, although the tenure of Gups and Chimis is specified in the Chathrim for Gups and Chimis, the existing three-year term for Gups and Chimis is too short, particularly in view of the implementation of development programmes under the Five-Year Plans. He said that, firstly, the present term does not allow enough time to implement and see the impact of the activities. Secondly, the Gups and Chimis are due for retirement before they have acquired enough knowledge about their responsibilities in implementing various programmes in their geogs. Therefore, the public of Chang Geog wished to request the government to extend the term of office for Gups and Chimis to five years.

The Chimis of Trongsa, Punakha, Haa, Trashigang, Wangdue Phodrang, Samtse and Tsirang Dzongkhags supported the point raised by the Thimphu Chimi to increase the tenure of Gups and Chimis to five years. They said that the proposal makes sense because of the increasing roles and responsibilities of the Gups and Chimis as a result of the process of decentralization that has been taking place over the years. They felt that the existing term of three years was too short. New Gups and Chimis need the first year to familiarize themselves with their work and after the second year when they have gained experience they are due for retirement. The tenure should, therefore, be increased to five years, which is also the duration of the Five-Year Plans. This will give more time for the Gups and Chimis to discharge their many responsibilities and alleviate the problems of the people. A five year tenure will enable the Gups and Chimis to ensure better implementation of the development programmes in their geogs for which substantial budgets are allotted by the government.

The Dzongdas of Tsirang and Sarpang Dzongkhags submitted that, based on their experiences of working in the Dzongkhags, they felt that the capability and effectiveness of the Gups and Chimis are more important than the tenure of their office. In most Dzongkhags, capable Gups and Chimis who faithfully discharge their responsibilities and serve the people with dedication are re-elected by the people and serve as Gups and Chimis for several terms. Therefore, there is no need to change the tenure of Gups and Chimis. They pointed out that the capable Gups and Chimis who are re-elected are also the most useful to the whole Dzongkhag. They had also observed that some Gups and Chimis, although capable, are not dedicated in their service to the people and their Dzongkhag. Such persons could even prove harmful for the interests of the people and the

Dzongkhags. Therefore, it will be better to give more importance to the abilities and dedication of the Gups and Chimis than to their tenure of office.

The Dzongdas of Thimphu and Pemagatshel Dzongkhags submitted that the issue of the tenure of Gups and Chimis required careful consideration by the hon'ble members. They felt that the capability and efficiency of Gups and Chimis would largely depend on their tenure. If the tenure is increased to five years, it will motivate the Gups and Chimis to take full responsibility in the implementation of developmental activities and enhance the results and success of these programmes. It will also enable the people to assess the performance of their Gups and Chimis and arrive at a better decision regarding their re-election. In keeping with the decentralization policy of the government, the responsibilities of Gups and Chimis have increased, particularly with regard to the implementation of developmental programmes under the Five-Year Plans. The execution and impact of these programmes will depend to a large extent on the supervision and capability of the Gups and Chimis. They also pointed out that a longer tenure for the Gups and Chimis will even contribute to the strengthening of the Dzongkhag administrations.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Bumthang Dzongda pointed out that while incapable Gups and Chimis completed their three year tenure without taking much interest in their responsibilities, those who are more capable and efficient usually served their terms with dedication. They also submitted that compared to the past, the responsibilities of Gups have doubled and the Chimis are also helping them. However, it has been noticed that some of the capable and efficient Gups and Chimis are usually not keen to continue in the posts once their three year tenure is over, even though the people want to re-elect them. Therefore, it is very necessary to consider how to motivate capable candidates to come forward for the posts of Gups and Chimis either by increasing the tenure of office or through some other means.

The Chimis of Wangdue Phodrang, Thimphu and Trashigatse Dzongkhags and the Lhuentse Dzongda submitted that it might seem inappropriate for the Chimis themselves to propose that their tenures should be increased. However, it is not for the sake of one or two individuals but for the benefit of all the people of the 20 Dzongkhags that the proposal is being made for the tenure of Gups and Chimis to be increased to five years. The Gups and Chimis have an important role in serving the people and the country. Their responsibilities range from the collection of rural taxes to the chairing of Block Development Committees and implementing developmental programmes. A five year

tenure will make the people choose their candidates very carefully and also enable the Gups and Chimis to discharge their responsibilities more effectively.

They pointed out that due to the lack of educated and capable candidates in the villages for the posts of Gups and Chimis, it takes longer for them to understand the policies of the government and their own responsibilities. Moreover, increasing the tenure for Gups and Chimis to five years will coincide well with the five year tenure of the cabinet ministers and the duration of the Five-Year Plans. They further pointed out that if in the course of the proposed five year tenure, the Gups and Chimis are found to be promoting their own interests instead of serving the people and the country, they can always be removed from office in accordance with the Chathrim for Gups and Chimis.

Intervening in the deliberation, His Majesty the King expressed His appreciation for the proposal to increase the tenure of Gups and Chimis from three to five years. However, it should be kept in mind that Gups and Chimis are elected by the people and, therefore, increasing their tenure is a matter which should be discussed by the people of all the 20 Dzongkhags, His Majesty said, While the people of Thimphu Dzongkhag have discussed this issue in their District Development Committee and accordingly forwarded the proposal to the National Assembly, this matter has not been discussed by the people of the other Dzongkhags. His Majesty, therefore, suggested that the people should be given the opportunity to discuss this issue in their respective District Development Committees and submit their decision to the 77th Session of the National Assembly which could then decide whether the tenure of Gups and Chimis should be increased.

In this connection, the Home Minister submitted that the Ministry of Home Affairs did not have the authority to increase the tenure of Gups and Chimis and it is a matter which should be decided by the National Assembly. Therefore, as commanded by His Majesty the King it will be better if the people discussed this matter first and submitted their views to the next session of the National Assembly.

The Home Minister submitted that the Assembly might wish to consider whether Gups and Chimis should have the same tenure or not. He said that in comparison to the past, the quality of Gups, Chimis and Mangi Aps have been improving every year due to the success of the education system and the fact that many retired government servants are interested in serving their country as Gups and Chimis.

The National Assembly resolved that, as pointed out by His Majesty the King, the Gups and Chimis are elected by the people, and therefore, the people should be given the opportunity of discussing whether the tenure of Gups and Chimis should be increased. Therefore, instead of passing a decision on this issue on the basis of a proposal made by the people of one Dzongkhag only, the matter should be discussed by the people of all the 20 Dzongkhags and their decision should be submitted through their respective District Development Committees for deliberation by the 77th Session of the National Assembly.

9. APPOINTMENT OF A NEW CHIMI FOR PHANGKHAR GEOG

The Ngangla Chimi said that the people of Ngangla and Phangkhar geogs in Zhemgang Dzongkhag submitted that the two geogs have only one Chimi at the moment. The two geogs are very far apart and the villages are too numerous for one Chimi to cover effectively. The public, therefore, requested for a separate Chimi for Phangkhar Geog. Supporting the request submitted by the people of Phangkhar Geog, a Royal Advisory Councillor and the Zhemgang Chimi pointed out that His Majesty the King's command to create Goshing as a new geog for the time being has been duly recorded. They said that the location of a large number of scattered villages and the difficult security situation in Ngangla Geog have made it necessary to create the new geog. They remarked that an appointment of a new Chimi for Phangkhar Geog, even as a temporary measure, would alleviate the difficulties of the people of Phangkhar.

The Tsirang Chimi and the Chimi of Lamgong Geog in Paro Dzongkhag agreed that, depending on the geographical size of the Dzongkhag, there are cases where a Chimi has to serve four to five geogs. They said that problems do not exist where villages are clustered and located close to each other. Problems and difficulties arise where there are dispersed settlements and the Chimi has to walk for two to three days from one village to the next. Therefore, they requested for such requests to be considered by the government in cases where it is physically not possible for a Chimi to effectively cover the people in his constituency.

In response, the Home Minister explained that a total of 105 people's representatives, including six Royal Advisory Councillors and 99 Chimis, out of the 150 Assembly members, are the direct representatives of the people. He said that this number is equivalent to 72% of the total representation in the National Assembly. In relation to our population, the people's representation in the National Assembly is perhaps the highest when compared to other countries of the world as the ratio of the 105 representatives to

our total population works out to one Chimi for 4,300 people. In other countries one member of parliament or the National Assembly would represent anywhere from one hundred thousand to a million people. Our people are, therefore, very well represented in the National Assembly. Further, there are 99 Chimis for the 202 geogs. Ngangla and Phangkhar are, therefore, not the only two geogs to be represented by one Chimi. The minister felt that it should be all right if the hon'ble members agreed to maintain the status quo on the matter.

The Dzongdas of Chukha and Lhuentse Dzongkhags pointed out that while the Gups face persistent difficulties in the course of discharging their responsibilities, including implementation of developmental activities in their geogs, the Chimis do not face the same degree of inconveniences in discharging their responsibilities even if they have to cover more than one geog. The Dzongdas, therefore, supported the submission of the Home Minister that there is no need to change the existing number of geogs and Chimis.

The National Assembly decided that it is not necessary to have a separate Chimi for Phangkhar Geog.

XII. ISSUES ON NGOLOPS

1. ISSUES ON NGOLOPS

The public of Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that some individuals, motivated by greed, have taken cash bribes from the ngolop leaders and involved themselves in spreading false religious and political propaganda to incite the people to turn against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. Realising the grave threat posed by these people, the public in close cooperation with the Royal Bhutan Police arrested these ngolops who are presently under custody. The people of Trashigang would like to request that these ngolops who are strongly condemned by them should be given the severest punishment under the laws of the land.

Similarly, the public of Pemagatsel Dzongkhag said that, as already submitted in the 75th Session of the National Assembly, all persons involved in anti-national activities must be strictly dealt with in accordance with the laws of the land without being granted Kidu.

They pointed out that although His Majesty the King has been granting amnesty to hundreds of ngolops, this gracious and magnanimous action has been mistaken as an act of weakness by these shameless people. Hence, it is imperative that people involved in ngolop activities are dealt with severely.

The Royal Government has been facing criticism from certain countries and various human rights organizations because they have been misinformed and misled by the slogans of democracy and human rights used by the ngolops. The ngolops resorted to this strategy of disguising their treacherous activities behind such slogans because they know that this is the only way to muster external support.

As far as the general public of Bhutan is concerned, there is no need for any change in our established system of government because our country is already highly democratic in its functioning, without having the disadvantages of a democracy. For example, in our country the people themselves make the development plans, thereby ensuring that the benefits of development plans filter right down to the grassroots level. In the ultimate analysis, what is important is not the official form of government, but whether it is promoting the interests of its citizens and taking care of their needs. In this regard, the people of Bhutan are happy and fully satisfied.

Therefore, in view of the above, the people of Pemagatshel request His Majesty the King and the Royal Government not to consider outside opinion but to accept the wishes of the people to deal firmly with all ngolops in strict accordance with the law.

The public of Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag submitted that some Gomchhen students of Lam Dodrup like Jigme Jamtsho, Karma Gaylag, Thinley Yozer, Pem Tenzin, Karjay and Sangay Dorji, all from Gomdar Geog and motivated by greed and vested interests, had turned against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. They attempted to instigate and misguide the innocent public of Gomdar, Martshalla and Orong geogs to come out in anti-government rallies in October, 1997. The people of Samdrupjongkhar, therefore, strongly urge the government not to show any leniency to these ngolops who are presently under detention and to punish them strictly as per the laws of the land. Further, the people also request His Majesty the King not to show any magnanimity and grant clemency to ngolop detainees handed over to the police by the public as they will again attempt to instigate and misguide the innocent public. For our part, the people of Samdrupjongkhar reiterate our commitment to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with total loyalty, support and dedication.

In response, the Home Minister said that, as submitted by the people's representatives of Trashigang, Pemagatsel and Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhags, the ngolops based in Nepal had attempted to incite and misguide the public of the eastern Dzongkhags to turn against the Tsa-Wa-Sum in 1997. However, the ngolops failed in their attempt to incite the people of eastern Bhutan and subsequently many of the leaders absconded to Nepal, while others were arrested.

Although their attempts to incite the people had failed, the ngolops in Nepal had tried their best to publicize that there was a massive uprising in all the eastern Dzongkhags in October, 1997.

The Home Minister pointed out that issues on ngolops and their punishment had been discussed during the previous sessions, particularly during the 75th Session of the National Assembly. The National Assembly had decided that ngolops attempting to harm the Tsa-Wa-Sum should be punished in accordance with the laws of the land, including the Thrimzhung Chhenpo and the National Security Act of 1992 as well as the resolutions of the past sessions of the National Assembly.

The Home Minister informed the Assembly members that only 129 persons, who had taken bribes from the ngolops, were responsible for attempting to incite the innocent public in the eastern Dzongkhags last year. They have been charge-sheeted under the

Thrimzhung Chhenpo and the National Security Act and are presently undergoing trial at the High Court in Thimphu.

The Home Minister assured the hon'ble members that the ngolops who have committed anti-national activities will be dealt with as per the laws of the land and in accordance with the resolutions of the National Assembly.

The Trashigang Dzongda said that the ngolops in Nepal had made a big publicity of an uprising in eastern Bhutan in October last year but all this talk of a massive uprising is just a publicity gimmick by the ngolops. The fact is that it was a case involving only 129 persons who the ngolops in Nepal managed to buy with money to incite the people of the eastern Dzongkhags against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. In the case of Trashigang, the ngolops had sent money to bribe the people in Yangnyer and Nanong under Womrong Dungkhag. In Nanong, the people themselves reported the activities of the ngolops to the Womrong

Dungkhag and handed over the few persons who had accepted bribes along with the Nu. 20,000 which the ngolops had sent to bribe the people.

Similarly, in Yangnyer Geog, the people caught the ngolop Yeshe Dorji and handed him over with the seditious literature and money which he had brought to bribe the people and incite them against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. The Dzongda assured the Assembly that it was only a handful of misguided people, motivated by greed, who had participated in ngolop activities. The general public of Trashigang are loyal and devoted subjects and we have no ngolop problem in our Dzongkhag, he said.

Basically, the whole issue was created by the ngolops in Nepal and the ngolop Rongthong Kinley Dorji who seem to think that all of us in the eastern Dzongkhags are like dumb animals. They appear to be under the impression that an addicted gambler, a loan defaulter and a fraudulent thief like Rongthong Kinley can get away with claiming he is a leader of the eastern Bhutanese and they are acting as if he is the King of the Eastern Bhutanese. But everyone knows what sort of a person he really is. Rongthong Kinley is not even from Trashigang but from Khen Mamung. He absconded from the country because there were many cases of fraud and loan default against him in the Courts of Law.

The Dzongda said that most of the 129 persons in the eastern Dzongkhag who took bribes from the ngolops and tried to bribe and incite other people were caught by the public and handed over along with the money found on them. When we reported this to the government, we received His Majesty the King's command to give this money to the people who had caught these ngolops, he said. Accordingly the money was given to the people. He informed the members that when His Majesty the King visited the eastern Dzongkhags for the Eighth Plan meetings, the people had reiterated that the bond of trust and loyalty between the people of eastern Bhutan and the Royal Government remained as close as milk and water. He assured the hon'ble members that there is no need to have any misgivings about the loyalty of the people of the eastern Dzongkhags to the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

Similarly, the Dzongda of Pemagatshel Dzongkhag assured the Assembly members that there is no ngolop problem in his Dzongkhag. The only problem in the Dzongkhag took place some time ago in 1991, when at the height of the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan, His Majesty the King had commanded that an image of Guru Dorji Dorli be instated at Yongla Gonpa for the well-being of the country. Lam Dodrup did not allow the image to be constructed at Yongla Gonpa saying that "when the host is not present why

should the guest from outside install an idol?” He had also said that there are hundreds of Lhakhangs in eastern Bhutan where the Dorji Droli image could be installed.

The Dzongda informed the members that before the Lona (black year) started this year, work has been started on the construction of three big images of Guru Dorji Droli, Guru Hortsho Jigpa and Phurba in Yongla Gonpa, on the command of His Majesty the King, as a Kurim for the country. He also informed the members that the Neten of Pemagatshel, who also looks after Yongla Gonpa, is the former Umzey of Lam Dodrup’s Shedra in Pemagatshel. He is from Khar Geog in Pemagatshel and was appointed as Neten by His Holiness the Je Khenpo. The false allegations by the ngolops that there was a massive uprising in the eastern Dzongkhags is utterly ridiculous to the people of Pemagatshel. Apart from the above problem in 1991, there is no ngolop problem in Pemagatshel. The people are all loyal to the Tsa-Wa-Sum and happily engaged in their daily activities and the implementation of the development programmes for their Dzongkhag.

The Dzongda of Samdrupjongkhar informed the members that in October last year, the ngolops in Nepal sent money to bribe the loyal public of Samdrupjongkhar and incite them to turn against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. A few of them, including a handful of Gomchens, motivated by greed, accepted bribes from the ngolops. Most of those involved received between Nu.50.00 and Nu.100.00 while the leaders among them were paid a few thousand Ngultrum.

He said that it was a matter of shame and embarrassment for the people of Samdrupjongkhar that out of the 129 persons arrested, 75 of them were from Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag. However, these shameless persons could not incite the loyal people of the Dzongkhag who refused to listen to them and instead caught them and handed them over to the police. There is no ngolop problem in Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag, said the Dzongda. The only problem we have is the problem of the Bodo and ULFA militants.

The Punakha Chimi expressed his satisfaction and appreciation over the submission of the Chimis of Samdrupjongkhar and Trashigang that the persons engaged in ngolop activities had been caught and handed over to the police by the people themselves. He pointed out that Bhutan is a land of the Dharma where the Kargyupa and Nyingmapa sects co-exist in harmony. The fact that Gomchens had taken part in ngolop activities could affect this religious harmony.

He said a small country like Bhutan can ill-afford to let any form of religious conflict creep into the society. If the ngolops can bribe people with small amounts of money, the situation must be studied carefully and the cause properly understood. Otherwise it could lead to an irreversible trend as the saying goes, “if the wrong path is taken only time is lost, but if the policy is wrong even the world will be affected.” The Chimi said that the members of the Assembly are deeply disappointed that the people studying in Shedras and Dubdras, who are expected to either serve the government and the people or pursue religious practices, have instead involved themselves in ngolop activities.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Haa Chimi submitted that as a saying goes, “an evil person harms the country, a troublesome bird disturbs the coop,” the ngolops from southern Bhutan who had been granted amnesty by His Majesty the King had invariably resumed their ngolop activities. Similarly, if the ngolops from eastern Bhutan are granted clemency it would encourage more ngolop activities to take place, he said. They pointed out that a fertile garden allows the growth of a variety of vegetables but it invites the growth of weeds as well. When the weeds are rooted out the vegetables will flourish.

They submitted that it is very important for the people of Bhutan to understand the intentions and implications of the actions by the ngolops. It is heartening and gratifying to know that the few ngolops in the eastern Dzongkhags were caught and handed over to the police by the people of the respective areas. If everyone informs the concerned authorities about any undesirable activities in their respective areas, such problems will not occur again.

They said that turning against one’s country is one of the most heinous crimes imaginable and deserves the severest punishment. Despite the establishment of numerous Buddhist institutions in the country, many people from the 20 Dzongkhags still sought Buddhist education in Dratshangs outside the country. They pointed out that some of these persons could easily be influenced and become more harmful than malicious spirits for the security of the country.

The Joint Secretary of the Division of Power and the Lhuentse Chimi reiterated that most of the people who participated in the ngolop activities against the Tsa-Wa-Sum in the eastern Dzongkhags had been incited by Gomchen followers of Lam Dodrup. For instance in Lhuentse Dzongkhag, five students of Lam Dodrup had collaborated with the ngolops and attempted to incite the people. However, their attempts were unsuccessful

because the people refused to listen to them and instead caught them and handed them over to the police. As the saying goes, “Having bought the wine yourself, you must drink it whether it is sweet or sour,” these persons who tried to incite the people must be punished strictly in accordance to the law.

The Chimis of Trashy Yangtse and Bumthang Dzongkhags pointed out that it is necessary to differentiate between the ngolops from the southern Dzongkhags and those from the east. The ngolops in the south had committed heinous crimes like murder, robbery and rape while in the east only a handful of persons, who had taken bribes from the ngolops in Nepal, tried to incite the people against the country. The general public of eastern Bhutan cannot be considered as ngolops. The mistakes of a few misguided miscreants do not speak for the general population of the eastern Dzongkhags who have total loyalty to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. They also pointed out that the reason why some of the people had become involved in ngolop activities is due to government policies not being effectively explained to them. Therefore, it is important for all Chimis to ensure that the people, particularly Gaylongs and Gomchens, are all called to Zomdus and clearly apprised on important national policies and objectives.

The Thimphu Chimi said that Bhutan is a land of the Dharma with a King who also upholds the Dharma. As a result, the people live in complete harmony under fair and just laws. He reminded the members that when the ngolop problem arose in southern Bhutan, His Majesty the King, through His great magnanimity, had granted amnesty to many ngolops who were arrested for their involvement in subversive activities. Instead of appreciating the magnanimity shown to them, these ngolops had resumed their anti-national activities like “a horse that kicks the hand that feeds it.” Because so many ngolops in the south had been granted amnesty, some people in the eastern Dzongkhags had accepted bribes from the ngolops in Nepal and involved themselves in treasonable activities. If these ngolops from the east are also granted clemency it might encourage people in the western Dzongkhags to also involve themselves in similar activities. On the other hand, punishing these ngolops strictly for their crimes, in accordance with the laws, would contribute towards preventing such problems in the future.

The Chimis of Punakha, Zhemgang, Trashy Yangtse, Lhuentse, Bumthang, Chukha, Haa, Pemagatshel, Mongar, Trongsa and Trashigang Dzongkhags informed the Assembly that most of the people of the three eastern Dzongkhags who were involved in ngolop activities were persons who had failed in practicing the Dharma or could not do honest

work in the villages or in business. While wandering around from village to village in the guise of religious practitioners these persons had accepted money, ranging from Nu. 100 to Nu. 200, from the ngolops and engaged in evil activities.

The general population have not taken part in such activities and are totally loyal and dedicated to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. They pointed out that as the saying goes, “the ocean may hold gems as well as many creatures,” there will be good as well as bad people in the country and such problems can occur in any part of the land. Therefore, it is important to distinguish those few people, motivated by vested interests and whose activities disgrace the country, from the rest of the population.

They said that the small problem in the eastern Dzongkhags last year was due to the failure to apprise the people about the plans and objectives of the ngolops to incite the simple people in the more remote parts of the country. As a result, a few of these people were deceived by those persons who had taken money and collaborated with the ngolops. Therefore, it is important that, henceforth, the Gups and the Chimis who are the bridge between the government and the people, make it a point to keep the people of their respective areas well informed of the ngolops and their activities and objectives.

The Chimis pointed out that the attempts by a few disloyal persons, motivated by greed and vested interests, to create problems in the country had not been successful due to the blessings of the Guardian Deities and the good fortune and the wise leadership of His Majesty the King. The Chimis offered their pledge that the loyal and dedicated citizens will not fail to catch and hand over to the police any person engaging in any form of subversive activities. They submitted that the ngolops presently under detention must be prosecuted and punished in strict accordance to the law.

The Finance Minister pointed out that the repeated submission by the hon’ble members on the ngolop problem is a clear indication of the deep concern which the people have for the security of the country. He said that in large countries, such problems against the government even by thousands of people are a common feature and does not harm the national security. In a country like Bhutan, with a small population, even a handful of disloyal people can harm not only the development activities but also the very security and sovereignty of the country. The Finance Minister reiterated that it is evident from the discussions in the Assembly, and also in the District Development Committee meetings, that the general public is very loyal and dedicated to the Tsa-Wa-Sum. He, however,

mentioned that there will always be a few miscreants, motivated by vested interests, who may try to harm the interests of the country through false allegations.

He said that the ngolop problem in the south started several years back and that only a few Gomchens driven by greed had participated in ngolop activities recently. He pointed out that it is a common phenomenon that there are always a few bad people in any society. Therefore, the view of some of the members that the present problem in eastern Bhutan arose due to religious conflicts is a wrong notion. Everyone is aware of the exaggerated publicity by the ngolops in Nepal to project the image that there was a massive uprising in eastern Bhutan when in reality only a few misguided people, lured by petty bribes, had participated in ngolops activities

The Finance Minister warned the Assembly that as a small country under one King, Bhutan cannot afford any internal conflict among its people. He said that such conflicts or disharmony will jeopardize the sovereignty and security of the nation and no single group will emerge the winner. Everyone will be the losers together. He, therefore, called for all the people of Bhutan to remain loyal to the Tsa-Wa-Sum and to stop any anti-national activity. He said it is the duty of all citizens to apprehend those aiding the ngolops and participating in such anti-national activities, and hand them over to the police as was done by the public of the eastern Dzongkhags

The National Assembly noted that it is the objective of the ngolops, based outside the country, to harm the country's unity and well-being, and accordingly they had given money to some of their collaborators and instructed them to bribe and incite the people of the eastern Dzongkhags to turn against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. The National Assembly expressed its satisfaction and appreciation that the loyal people of eastern Bhutan apprehended the ngolop collaborators and handed them over to the police.

The National Assembly resolved that regarding ngolop activities in any part of the country, it should be the responsibility of the people of the concerned areas to keep in mind the good example set by the general public of the eastern Dzongkhags, as given above, and deal with any such problem. Regarding the punishment for ngolops, the matter shall be dealt with in accordance to the laws of the land and the resolutions of the National Assembly.

2. FALSE ALLEGATIONS BY NGOLOPS WHO HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY

The public of Dunglagang, Shemjong, Tshokana, Pataley, Kilkhorthang and Beteni geogs in Tsirang Dzongkhag submitted that the treacherous ngolops, who left the country of their own will after selling their property, are not only making false allegations against the government and criticizing its policies but also talking shamelessly of returning to the country. These ngolops have not only revolted against the Tsa-Wa-Sum but have threatened the very peace and security of the country.

The people of Tsirang reiterated the request they had made in the previous sessions of the National Assembly that these ngolops who have left the country should never be allowed to return.

In response, the Home Minister said that, as submitted by the public of Tsirang Dzongkhag, the ngolops have become experts in committing heinous crimes against the people of Bhutan and then blaming the Royal Government. He pointed out that the real people who have violated human rights are the ngolops based in the refugee camps in Nepal who have been launching continuous raids and terrorizing the people of Bhutan. At the same time, they have been making false allegations to malign the Royal Government with friendly donor countries and international organizations.

Updating the Assembly on the terrorist activities and crimes that the ngolops had committed, the Home Minister said that the ngolops had kidnapped many people to their camps across the border and murdered them. The police confirmed 72 murders, 63 cases of rape, 241 kidnappings, 1,028 armed robberies, 64 cases of hijacking of vehicles, excluding two wheelers, while 692 people were injured in the course of terrorist raids and robberies by the ngolops. At the same time, 12 ngolops were killed in encounters with the village volunteers when these terrorists raided villages in southern Bhutan, and 118 ngolops were apprehended and handed over to the police by the village volunteers. In addition, the ngolops had forcefully stripped many innocent people of their ghos and kiras and cut them into pieces or burnt them, besides robbing them of their cash and property and causing them unbearable sufferings. Further, the ngolops had destroyed and sabotaged 12 health centres and 12 police checkpoints, four revenue and customs offices and post offices, 21 forest offices, bombed and burned 29 schools, five guest houses and three Gup's offices, set on fire and destroyed 66 villages houses, destroyed or damaged 37 vehicles, destroyed two Dungkhag offices, 16 bridges and 17 electric pylons, looted three PWD stores, destroyed five agriculture centres and four livestock centres, destroyed and

looted 15 rural water supply schemes and seven industries. The minister pointed out that the ngolops had also destroyed the irrigation channel in Taklai, Gelephu, which was built for the benefit of the people of Gelephu with Nu.48.860 million assistance from international organizations. They had looted and sold the materials to the Indians across the border. Similarly, the ngolops destroyed and looted large tracts of forest with valuable timber in southern Bhutan, thereby causing the Royal Government a loss of more than Nu.300 million in revenue. He added that the ngolops had ambushed and attacked government officials and security force personnel 67 times and injured 41 security men including officers.

The Home Minister pointed out that the ngolops are claiming that the Royal Government has violated human rights but, as these facts show, they are the ones who have violated every aspect of human rights. As the hon'ble members are fully aware, the ngolops had broken laws and spread false allegations, embezzled and stolen public funds, and committed acts of terrorism in Bhutan and had all run away to the camps in Nepal from where they have been continuously making baseless allegations against the Royal Government. They are supported in their efforts to malign the Royal Government by many of the thousands of NGOs in Nepal which are involved with the ngolops because of vested interests to attract international support and money for themselves.

The Royal government is aware that the ngolops and the media in Nepal have been deliberately spreading misinformation about Bhutan. They have launched a relentless propaganda campaign against Bhutan to misinform the international community and to gather support for themselves.

The Home Minister pointed out that the ngolops are deliberately trying to misinform and mislead the foreign countries and the international organizations through slogans of democracy and human rights in order to win their sympathy and support and get as much assistance as possible from them.

He said that the ngolops have been claiming that there are over 100,000 refugees in the camps in Nepal. However, what we know is that there are a large number of people in the camps who are not Bhutanese.

The Home Minister reminded the members that the main objective of the ngolops is to bring all those people in the camps claiming to be Bhutanese refugees to Bhutan and grab

political power so that all of them can be made Bhutanese citizens, and given jobs and land.

The Home Minister informed the Assembly that while the government is doing everything possible to correct the misinformation and propaganda against the country, Bhutan being a small country with limited resources, has not been able to launch an effective publicity campaign. Bhutan has diplomatic relations with just 18 countries and embassies in only five countries. On the other hand, Nepal has diplomatic relations with more than 80 countries and a large number of Nepalese citizens are working overseas and in the numerous international organizations. It must also be remembered that the ngolops and the other people who are claiming to be Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have the full support and backing of the government and the people of Nepal, he said.

The Home Minister briefed the Assembly that since 1991, the Royal Government had invited a number of international human rights organizations to visit the kingdom. These included the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Refugee International (USA) and Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The Royal Government also invited three officials of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and a member-group of the UN Centre for Human Rights to see the situation in Bhutan for themselves. In fact, organizations like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have so far completed eleven visits to Bhutan. He said that these international organizations were invited by the Royal Government to see for themselves that the situation in Bhutan is very different from the misconception created by the ngolops.

While making his intervention, the Director of the Health Division thanked the Assembly for giving him the opportunity to express his views before the august gathering. He also offered his sincere Tashi Delek to the Speaker, the newly elected cabinet ministers, the Deputy Speaker and the Royal Advisory Councillors-elect. Confirming the submission of the Home Minister that the ngolops had so far destroyed 12 health centres, he said the ngolops had not only destroyed these health centres but also a large amount of medicines and expensive medical equipment. Secondly, the ngolops physically attacked and injured a number of health workers and medical personnel. Therefore, as a result of the serious security problems, many health centres had to be closed down, but later when the problems were to some extent under control, most of them were re-opened on the command of His Majesty the King.

Thanking the Assembly for giving him the opportunity to speak for the first time before the august house, the Foreign Minister expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for reposing full faith in him and his five colleagues and nominating them. He also thanked the members of the Assembly for the powerful mandate conveyed through the ballot. Just as his father and three earlier generations before him had served the government and the people to the best of their ability, since fighting alongside Gongsar Jigme Namgyel in the plains of Dungsum Deothang, he pledged his body, mind and speech to the service of His Majesty the King and the people.

The Foreign Minister reminded the Assembly that when the Royal Government first became aware of the large number of illegal immigrants, the Census and Immigration Division had conducted a thorough census which revealed that many illegal migrants were living in Bhutan. Consequently, these illegal immigrants and Bhutanese citizens with vested interests turned against the government, thus beginning the ngolop problem. Later, when the illegal immigrants returned to their homeland in Nepal, some Bhutanese citizens also surrendered their citizenship and followed these people to Nepal in an expression of solidarity. These ngolops have since then carried out frequent raids into Bhutan and committed innumerable crimes including robbery, rape and murder on the innocent people of Bhutan. Further, as submitted by the Tsirang Chimi, the ngolops, through false and malicious propaganda, alleged that there is discrimination in Bhutan on the grounds of ethnicity, language, dress, religion and custom, and that the government forced all people to adhere to the Drukpa culture. The ngolops also alleged that the Royal Government had, instead of looking after the welfare of the people, resorted to repression and had no respect for human rights. They also alleged that external aid received for development programmes had been misused and that all the people in the camps in Nepal are Bhutanese refugees. He said that in the initial stage, when the ngolops carried out this misinformation campaign to discredit the government, they were able to mislead the international community.

The Foreign Minister said that the motive for the misinformation campaign by the ngolops was firstly, to discredit the Royal Government in the eyes of the international community with the aim to stop foreign assistance, and secondly, to create disaffection among the people and to take over the country with the help of the large number of displaced Nepalese in the region.

He informed the members that the misinformation campaign of the ngolops had been initially effective because the international community was not aware of the fact that firstly, His Majesty the King treated all citizens with impartiality, irrespective of ethnicity, religion and language; secondly, the government and the people enjoy complete faith and confidence in each other which has contributed to a highly successful national development process; and thirdly, as Bhutan is a land of the Dharma, the people not only value human rights but even respect the rights of all sentient beings. Further, the international community had also not been aware of the most transparent way in which the Royal Government had been utilizing internal resources and external aid to enhance the welfare of the people in the most prudent way. Fifthly, they were also not aware that the people in the camps in Nepal actually belonged to different backgrounds such as illegal immigrants, displaced Nepalese migrants from the region and others who had emigrated from Bhutan with various motives.

As Bhutan has only five embassies abroad, the Royal Government, on its own, has not been able to counter these false allegations effectively. However, the Foreign Minister quoted His Majesty the King who had always said that falsehood will eventually be exposed and truth will prevail in the end.

As already submitted earlier, on the command of His Majesty the King, the Royal Government had invited the representatives of many human rights organizations among which were Amnesty International and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. These organizations were invited to see for themselves the state of human rights in the country. Further, the Royal Government also invited representatives from the Human Rights Centre, with which it has worked out a joint scheme for co-operation in the field of human rights.

The Royal Government also invited representatives from the office of the UNHCR, which looks after more than 21 million refugees world-wide, to see the situation within Bhutan and to discuss the issue of the people in the camps in Nepal, particularly concerning their origin and their problems.

Representatives of the ICRC also visited Bhutan. The Royal Government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the ICRC, based on which representatives of this organization have visited Bhutan eleven times since 1991. The main purpose of their visits is to study the conditions of detention of the terrorists, most of whom were caught and

handed over to the police by the people of southern Bhutan during their attempts to commit acts of terrorism.

As the ngolops alleged that the Royal Government had convicted and imprisoned innocent people without recourse to law, the Royal Government invited representatives of the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to conduct their own investigations. The Working Group found that these allegations were not true.

Representatives of the United Nations had visited Bhutan to assess the system of governance and the rule of law in the country. In addition, a delegation of the European Parliament also visited Bhutan. This delegation praised the Bhutanese system of government. Furthermore, the Royal Government had invited representatives of friendly and donor countries, who also greatly appreciated our system.

It is clear, therefore, that despite the consistent effort of the ngolops to discredit the government, His Majesty's faith in the prevalence of truth has triumphed and, even after eight years, the ngolops have not been able to accomplish their evil designs. On the contrary, their false allegations have been exposed.

On the submission of the Tsirang Chimi that those people who had left the country be banned from returning, the Foreign Minister informed the Assembly that, as commanded by His Majesty the King, the Bhutan-Nepal talks were continuing and he expressed his hope that they would reach an early and successful conclusion.

As the saying goes, "an evil person harms the country, and a troublesome bird disturbs the coop," the existence of bad elements in every society is only natural. This being the case, it is important that we give some thought to how a few ill-advised and ill-intentioned people have been able to stir up trouble in our country. The Foreign Minister attributed this largely to the fact that the majority of the people were illiterate and, therefore, vulnerable to the manipulations of people with vested interests.

The Foreign Minister praised the knowledge, wisdom and the loyalty that was clearly evident in the interventions of the members. He, therefore, wondered whether the hon'ble members should interact more closely with the people and give them the benefit of their guidance. He argued that if evil people can influence others around them, there is no reason why good people cannot be more powerful in guiding the people to be responsible

citizens. He urged that when the members return to their respective constituencies, they should take on the responsibility of thus preventing the bad elements from spreading their influence over our innocent people.

The Punakha Chimi said that the deep concerns of the public of Tsirang over the ngolop problem is shared by the whole country. The immense sufferings caused to the people of southern Bhutan by the ngolops is felt equally by the people of northern Bhutan also. The Chimi said that the ngolops had resorted to false allegations against the country because when people want to create trouble they will say anything. It had now become a matter of habit for the people in the camps in Nepal to misinform the international organizations on the human rights situation in Bhutan so as to receive sympathy and material assistance for themselves. The ngolops are acting as if Bhutan has sold its human rights and they had bought it. The Bhutanese people know best the situation of human rights in Bhutan and there is no need for the ngolops to be so agitated and make it any of their business.

He wondered whether the murder, robbery, sabotage and destruction of social infrastructures such as schools, agriculture centres and health facilities carried out by the ngolops is their concept of human rights. Our concept of human rights, he said, is for all human beings to enjoy their individual rights in a lawful manner without encroaching on the rights of others. In fact, the respect for the rights of others will come naturally to all those who genuinely believe in human rights.

Just as one who shouts on the ground cannot be heard up in the sky, the baseless allegations of the ngolops are worthless, he said. Untruth and falsehoods cannot harm us. What is most important, he said, is for the government and people to work together with loyalty and dedication to promote the noble policy of one nation and one people under one King.

The Speaker pointed out that, as submitted by the Home Minister and the Foreign Minister, the ngolops who left the country have resorted to false allegations to gain the sympathy and support of the Nepalese people in Nepal and the international organizations. The hon'ble members are well aware that there is no truth in the false allegations against the Royal Government and its policies, and as clarified by the Foreign Minister, the international human rights organizations have also understood this clearly.

Under the reign of His Majesty the King, Bhutan has achieved unprecedented economic development and the security and sovereignty of the country have also been further

strengthened. The people are enjoying peace and prosperity under the cherished system of hereditary monarchy which is the life force of the Palden Drukpa. We are all aware that the ngolops have resorted to spreading their false allegations to disrupt the peace, prosperity and stability of the country.

The National Assembly resolved that since the Royal Government has been countering the false allegations of the ngolops upto now, it shall continue to deal with such allegations as found to be necessary. It was also decided that there is no need for the Royal Government to counter every false allegation made by the ngolops.

3. BAN ON RETURN OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE LEFT THE COUNTRY

The public of Samdrupjongkhar and Trashigang Dzongkhags submitted that the ngolops who have left the country should not be taken back or allowed to return under any circumstances as they have left the country of their own free will. They pointed out that His Majesty the King, despite the high security risk involved, visited the southern Dzongkhags and pleaded with these people not to emigrate and leave the country but they paid no heed and left the country. Now they are claiming to be Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. It has been heard that these people are attempting to re-enter the country through various means. Allowing such people to return will undermine the citizenship laws of the country. Therefore, these people who have emigrated and non-nationals claiming to be Bhutanese refugees must not be allowed to come to Bhutan under any circumstances.

The public of Samtse pointed out that their Dzongkhag has become the main target of continued terrorist attacks by the anti-nationals from the camps in Jhapa, Nepal. Since 1989, in addition to destroying many facilities like schools, health units, agriculture and animal husbandry centres and bridges, the ngolop terrorists have robbed 234 families, assaulted 70 people and killed 22 people in Samtse Dzongkhag.

They said that while their village volunteers, with the help of the security force have been able to control and catch a few terrorists, their attacks are still continuing, the latest being on the night of 12th June 1998 when five terrorists attacked and looted the house of Mrs. Chandra Maya Ghalley of Jamirkot, Biru geog in Sipsu Dungkhag. The terrorists took cash, gold, ID cards and tax receipts and also raped her 19 year old daughter Dhan Maya Ghalley and two of their daughters-in-law, Madhu Maya Ghalley and Ganga Maya Ghalley.

For the above reasons, the people of Samtse would like to appeal to the Royal Government not to take back anyone who has left the country and to make it a pre-condition that the terrorist and anti-Bhutan activities by the people in the camps in Nepal must stop before any further talks take place between Bhutan and Nepal.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Haa Chimi pointed out that His Majesty the King, through His magnanimous concern for the people of Bhutan, has assured that every Bhutanese from all the four directions of the country, have been given equal opportunity in everything including employment in government service. As such, Lhotshampas have also received the same opportunity without any impartiality and have received employment from the level of a peon and a constable to the rank of a minister. Instead of being grateful, the ngolops in the south chose to bite the hand that fed them and turned against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. They destroyed many development and service centres and absconded from the country while others emigrated to Nepal after surrendering their Bhutanese citizenship. Subsequently, these same ngolops who have committed terrorist activities, and those who left the country of their own will, re-entered Bhutan from time to time to inflict unthinkable suffering on the innocent people of Bhutan through crimes like murder, rape and armed robbery. Even today, the ngolops from the so-called refugee camps in Nepal continue to carry out frequent raids into Bhutan. Therefore, the Royal Government must not allow even a single ngolop to come back to Bhutan.

In response, the Home Minister pointed out that the hon'ble members have submitted that the ngolops who have left the country should not be allowed to return under any circumstances. These views of the public reflect their genuine concern for the present and future well-being and security of the country. As the hon'ble members are aware, the policy of the Royal Government has always been very clear regarding the people in the camps in Nepal who are claiming to be Bhutanese refugees. The ministerial level talks between Bhutan and Nepal have agreed that there are four categories of people in the camps in Nepal

- i. Bonafide Bhutanese if (they) have been evicted forcefully;
- ii. Bhutanese who have emigrated;
- iii. Non-Bhutanese people;
- iv. Bhutanese who have committed criminal acts.

Regarding Category I, he said that His Majesty the King and the Royal Government have always made it clear from the very beginning that the Royal Government will take full responsibility for any Bhutanese found to have been forcefully evicted from the country. Such people would be recognized as genuine refugees and any person found responsible for forcefully evicting a bonafide Bhutanese will be liable for punishment under the laws of the country.

On Category II, he informed the members that the Royal Government has made it clear that those who have emigrated should be dealt with in keeping with the citizenship and immigration laws of Bhutan and Nepal. The Royal Government has also agreed that if any Bhutanese who emigrated is found to have been forcefully made to leave the country, he or she would fall under Category I and will be dealt with accordingly.

On Category III, the Home Minister said that those people found to be non-Bhutanese and have come from other countries must return to their respective countries.

On Category IV, repatriation of these people will be in keeping with the laws of the two countries and they will have full opportunity to prove their innocence in the Court of Law in Bhutan.

The Home Minister said that, apart from the bilateral meetings between the officials of Bhutan and Nepal, His Majesty the King has conveyed our positions on these four categories of people to the successive Prime Ministers of Nepal during His meetings with them.

He pointed out that, as the hon'ble members are aware, the ngolops in Nepal have turned the Nepalese in Nepal against Bhutan. They have also turned the Nepalese of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and the Duars in India against Bhutan and have formed as many as 31 support groups in these areas. They have also tried to turn the political parties in India against Bhutan, besides attempting to disrupt and jeopardize the existing excellent relationship between Bhutan and India on the pretext of so-called peace marches and other illegal activities. Similarly, they have attempted to turn other friendly countries against Bhutan, he said.

The Home Minister reminded the members that, concerned by the above subversive activities of the ngolops, the issue of banning the return of people who have left the

country has been discussed repeatedly during the past sessions of the National Assembly. It has been resolved that the issue will be dealt with in accordance with the laws of the country, including the Citizenship Act, and the relevant resolutions of the 71st Session of the National Assembly. Accordingly, the government has been following these resolutions of the National Assembly and, therefore, there is no need for a separate resolution to be adopted on this issue during the current session of the National Assembly.

The Tsirang Chimi said that, as submitted by the other Chimis, the ngolops who left the country after committing unthinkable crimes, have been infiltrating into Bhutan to commit theft and robbery, murder, rape, and other heinous acts on the loyal and innocent people of Bhutan, thus violating their basic human rights. They disrupted the rapid development of the country by destroying schools, health units, agricultural and animal husbandry centres. The people cannot forgive them for the suffering which they caused. They must never be allowed to return to the country as it will be unthinkable to allow them to live among the people they have killed and raped.

A Royal Advisory Councillor said that the people all over the country are against the return of the ngolops because of their deep concern for the security of the country. He said that about five to 10 percent of those who left had illegally entered the country. It is easy for the ngolops to evade detection at the checkpoints by carrying forged Bhutanese citizenship identity cards and by wearing ghos and kiras. It is common knowledge that Bhutanese identity cards have been printed in large numbers and distributed in the camps in Nepal. He suggested that, as a temporary measure, all the identity cards of bonafide Bhutanese citizens should be collected and checked to identify them from forged ones.

The Chukha Dzongda said that the Assembly agenda “ban on the return of people who have left the country,” is wrong. It should have been “ban on people who come to rob the country, pretending to be Bhutanese,” because these are people who have left Bhutan and returned to their own country, Nepal. There is no need to ban their return because they are not Bhutanese citizens, he said.

The National Assembly noted that the issue on the “ban on return of people who have left the country” was not a new issue but had been deliberated since the 71st Session of the National Assembly and resolutions had also been passed. Therefore, the Assembly resolved that the issue on “ban on return of people who have left the country” shall be

dealt with in accordance with the resolutions of the 71st Session to 75th Session of the National Assembly and the Citizenship Act.

4. EXTRADITION OF RONGTHONG KINLEY DORJI

The public of Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag submitted that the ngolop Rongthong Kinley Dorji must be extradited from India to Bhutan to face criminal charges as per the laws of the land. They pointed out that despite his involvement in anti-national activities, His Majesty the King graciously granted him royal pardon with the expectation that he would realize his mistakes. However, instead of showing gratitude for the magnanimous Kidu granted to him, he absconded from the country, and thereafter involved himself in ngolop activities. Rongthong Kinley Dorji, through seditious activities and false propaganda, tried to create misunderstanding and unrest between the public and the government. Further, his ngolop organization was also responsible for the anti-national rallies attempted on 23rd October 1997 in the three geogs of Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag. Therefore, the public of Samdrupjongkhar strongly submit that Rongthong Kinley Dorji must be extradited and punished as per the laws of the land.

Similarly, the public of Trashigang Dzongkhag submitted that several charges of criminal activities and financial offences are pending against Rongthong Kinley in several Courts of Law in Bhutan. Notwithstanding his grave misdeeds, he is claiming to be a political leader after having absconded from the country and has been attempting to misguide the people with bribes to turn against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. The public of Trashigang strongly condemn Rongthong Kinley and request the Royal Government to have him extradited so that he can be tried and punished for his crimes as per the laws of the land.

Similarly the Chimis of Zhemgang, Samtse and Trashigang Dzongkhags pointed out that Rongthong Kinley is a fugitive criminal who had absconded from the country after failing to repay numerous loans from the financial institutions and private parties. The ngolop Rongthong Kinley has been attempting to subvert and overthrow the established government of Bhutan. He has been trying to tarnish Bhutan's image with baseless claims of human rights violation and other false allegations. He does not seem to be aware that all plans and decisions in Bhutan, including the calls to extradite and punish ngolop leaders, are being made by the people through institutions like the Block Development Committees and the District Development Committees. The Chimis submitted that Rongthong Kinley must be extradited to Bhutan and punished as per the laws of the land. Further, they also requested that ngolop leaders like Bhim Subba, R.B. Basnet and R.K.

Budhathoki who absconded from the country after embezzling huge amounts of public funds, and their main accomplices, should also be extradited to Bhutan and punished for their crimes.

In response, the Home Minister said that, last year, during the 75th Session of the National Assembly, the Home Ministry had reported that the ngolop Rongthong Kinley was arrested and remanded in judicial custody in India. The National Assembly was also informed that the Royal Government had requested the Government of India to extradite Rongthong Kinley in accordance with the Extradition Agreement of 1996 signed between the Republic of India and the Kingdom of Bhutan so that he could face charges of financial fraud and non-payment of loans to the government, financial institutions and private parties.

The Home Minister reminded the members that there are a total of seven cases of financial fraud filed against Rongthong Kinley by the financial institutions and private parties in several Courts of Law in Bhutan. Five of these cases were already sub-judice in the different Courts even before he left the country while two other cases were filed against him in the Samdrupjongkhar and Mongar District Courts by two of his former business associates after he absconded to Nepal. Of the seven cases, one of the cases filed before the High Court was, in fact, registered by R.B. Basnet, the president of the so-called BNDP when he was the Director of Revenue and Customs. The Minister also informed the members that as of 30th June 1998, Rongthong Kinley has a total loan liability of Nu, 12,368,533.00 against him.

The Home Minister informed the members that he himself was involved in one of the cases when he was serving in the Ministry of Trade and Industry as a Deputy Secretary. In 1982-83, Rongthong Kinley had failed to pay government royalty for coal mines in Samdrupjongkhar district given on lease to him, inspite of many notices issued to him. When he failed to meet the deadline, as per the directives of His Royal Highness, Prince Namgyel Wangchuck who was then the minister for Trade and Industry, an official team consisting of the following officers was deputed to seize the coal mines and assess the value of the coal stocks and other assets:

1. Dasho Chenchu, Thrimpon, Samdrupjongkhar
2. Dasho Zimba, Yongzin, RBP, S/Jongkhar

3. Thinley Gyamtsho, Dy. Secretary/MTI
4. Tenzin Thinley, Vice President, BCCI, (S/Jongkhar)
5. Leki Tshewang, Representative, Ministry of Finance, Thimphu.
6. Gyeltshen Wangdi, Representative of S/Jongkhar Dzongkhag (presently working in RRCO, Phuentsholing)
7. Tshenchok Thinley, Assistant Director, MTI and now working in Tashi Commercial Corporation, Thimphu.

The team visited each of a dozen coal mines in the forests along the Indo-Bhutan border and dutifully completed the assignment over a period of two weeks. Rongthong Kinley refused to accept the assessment of the value of the coal stocks and other assets saying that it was arbitrary. Accordingly, in 1983 the Ministry of Trade and Industry engaged the services of M/S SGS India Limited, an independent auditors firm from Calcutta to reassess the value of his assets. Rongthong Kinley, however, refused to accept the assessment value of M/S SGS India Limited and settle the outstanding dues against him on account of royalty on coal mines which now total to a sum of Nu 5,679,725.35 as of 30th June 1998.

The minister pointed out that besides the above mentioned seven cases of financial fraud and non-payment of loans, there are four other charges against Rongthong Kinley for seditious activities, fabricating allegations, trying to create social and religious disharmony in the country and carrying out threats and criminal intimidation. These charges were drawn up in accordance with the provisions of the National Security Act of 1992.

As submitted above, until recently, Rongthong Kinley was remanded in judicial custody in India. However, on 12th June 1998, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in Delhi released Rongthong Kinley on bail on the following conditions:

- i. he shall be kept under constant surveillance;
- ii. he is required to report to the concerned police station twice a week; and

iii.the travel documents issued by the Government of Nepal to Rongthong Kinley are to be surrendered to the Court.

The Home Minister informed the members that, as Bhutan has excellent relations with India, an Extradition Agreement was signed between the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Republic of India at the Tashichhodzong, Thimphu on 28th December 1996. The Agreement was signed by Lyonpo Dago Tshering and His Excellency Mr. Dalip Mehta, Ambassador of India in Bhutan, in the presence of His Majesty the King. The Royal Government of Bhutan confirmed and ratified the Extradition Agreement on 19 May, 1997 and it was also ratified by the Cabinet as well as the President of India.

The Home Minister pointed out that it is now upto the Government of India whether or not Rongthong Kinley is to be extradited to Bhutan, as requested by the Royal Government of Bhutan, in accordance with the provisions of the Extradition Agreement of 1996 between the two countries.

Chimi after Chimi reiterated that the ngolop Rongthong Kinley should be punished according to the laws of the land for his crimes. The Minister for Health and Education intervened and reminded the members that the issue on extradition of Rongthong Kinley Dorji had been discussed several times in the past sessions of the National Assembly. Therefore, he requested the Assembly not to waste its precious time and energy on such a notorious and degenerate criminal like Rongthong Kinley who has refused to repay government and private loans and instead engaged in treasonable activities against the country, not knowing the meaning of Tha-Damtse (faith and loyalty) and Ley-Jumdrey (cause and effect of one's act). Instead, the hon'ble members should devote themselves to important national issues. The members agreed to the minister's submission and decided that it would be better to deliberate on the country's economic development instead of wasting time on a demeaning criminal like Rongthong Kinley.

The National Assembly noted that since Rongthong Kinley has refused to pay the royalties due to the government as well as the loans that he had taken from the financial institutions and private parties, he had violated the law. Further, he had committed fraudulent activities and then attempted to harm the Tsa-Wa-Sum. Therefore, the National Assembly expressed its hope that, as submitted by the Home Minister, the Government of India would extradite Rongthong Kinley in accordance with the Extradition Agreement between Bhutan and India. The Assembly also resolved that the Royal Government should keep in mind the submissions of the Assembly members and Resolution TA (6) of the 75th Session on this issue, and persuade the Government of India to extradite Rongthong

Kinley to Bhutan in accordance with the Extradition Agreement between the two countries.

5. COMPULSORY RETIREMENT OF RELATIVES OF NGOLOPS FROM THE CIVIL SERVICE

The public of Khebisa Geog in Dagana Dzongkhag expressed their satisfaction over the various initiatives by the Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC) to improve the quality of the civil service in the Royal Government. They also noted that, as part of the normal screening process, civil servants involved in ngolop activities or aiding the ngolops against the Tsa-Wa-Sum have been compulsorily retired. The people of Dagana, in particular, the public of Khebisa Geog, expressed their satisfaction that the resolution of the 75th Session of the National Assembly to compulsorily retire relatives of ngolops had been implemented, because ngolop relatives posed a grave security risk to the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The Dzongdas of Dagana, Lhuentse and Bumthang Dzongkhags, a Royal Advisory Councillor and the Chimis of Punakha and Paro Dzongkhags expressed their deep satisfaction and appreciation to the Royal Civil Service Commission for implementing the resolution of the past session of the National Assembly and compulsorily retiring relatives of ngolops from the civil service. They further requested the concerned authorities to keep in mind the present and future security of the country and continue to retire relatives of ngolops from the civil service. There is no choice but to take such difficult decisions in the interest of the nation. People who stood with one foot inside and the other outside the country could not be trusted and, therefore, should never have been employed by the government. The RCSC must carefully screen civil service employees, so as to ensure that the people employed in government service are loyal and dedicated and do not pose a threat to the security of the country.

The Home Minister informed the members that retrenchment of civil servants is an ongoing process carried out regularly by the RCSC in its effort to improve the quality of the civil servants and build a compact and efficient civil service. It is also in keeping with the government's efforts to divert as many educated and trained manpower as possible from the civil service to the private sector so that Bhutan's private sector will develop and contribute to the socio-economic growth of the country.

In the course of meeting these two important objectives of human resources development, the RCSC has released from the civil service a total of 9,026 civil servants, including 37 Red Scarf officers and senior officers of Grade III and above during the past twelve and half years from 1985 to 1997. This is a large number if we consider the fact that the present size of Bhutan's civil service is only 13,137 .

The Home Minister recalled that, last year, during its 75th Session, the National Assembly had debated for two days over the security risks posed by the continued employment of the relatives of ngolops in government service. The situation had become even more serious in view of the continued threat from the ngolops in Nepal being compounded by the threat to the national security posed by the presence of ULFA and Bodo militants inside Bhutanese territory. After in-depth deliberations, the National Assembly had issued a resolution that all relatives of ngolops in government service should be compulsory retired with post service benefits, as admissible under the RCSC rules, and the Royal Civil Service Commission was directed to implement the decision without undue delay. Accordingly, the directives of the National Assembly was carried out.

The Home Minister said that the RCSC has been always governed by the Royal Charter on the Royal Civil Service Commission issued in 1982, the various resolutions of the National Assembly and its own Bhutan Civil Service Rules, 1990 in the course of discharging its three main functions which are:

- a) administration of civil servants,
- b) Bhutan's human resource development, and
- c) providing employment to the educated youth.

He said that the RCSC has constantly endeavored to carry out these mandates without any 'fear or favour' and without any discrimination, especially in the case of Southern Bhutanese inspite of the serious ngolop problem in southern Bhutan during the past eight to nine years. He pointed out that of the above mentioned 9,026 civil servants retired since 1985, only 3,424 or 37 percent have been from southern Bhutan, and of the 37 Red Scarf and other senior officers of Grade III and above retired, only eight were from southern Bhutan.

As of 1998, even after the compulsory retirement of the relatives of ngolops as per the National Assembly resolution, 24 percent of the civil servants are from southern Bhutan.

In addition, several thousand other Southern Bhutanese continue to serve in our security forces and the government corporations.

In spite of the fact that as many as 470 Lhotshampa civil servants have absconded from the country to join the ngolops, after stealing large amounts of government funds and assets, and in spite of the fact that today the leaders of almost all the ngolop groups in Nepal are former Lhotshampa civil servants, the RCSC has inducted a total of 1,334 more Lhotshampas into the civil service over the past eight years. Since 1990, the RCSC has also promoted 1,567 Lhotshampa civil servants. Despite the fact that many Lhotshampas sent abroad for higher studies have refused to return to Bhutan, a total of 848 Lhotshampas have been sent abroad for training and higher studies since 1990.

The Home Minister said that while the RCSC cannot be sure on the performance of each and every civil servant, it is, however, confident that many of the civil servants we have today can be, by and large, trusted with the sacred responsibility of serving the Tsa-Wa-Sum. On behalf of the other members of the Royal Civil Service Commission, the Home Minister pledged that they will always be vigilant in ensuring that only those persons who are dedicated to the Tsa-Wa-Sum will be inducted or continue to serve in the civil service.

The Home Minister also expressed his sincere hope and prayer that all the civil servants would appreciate the free education, and subsequently the employment given to them by the Royal Government, as well as the salary increases granted by His Majesty the King on at least two occasions over the past two years. As the Finance Minister had already reported, His Majesty the King had recently issued a Kasho to improve the post service benefits of the civil servants. We hope and pray that our civil servants will prove themselves worthy of all these Kidu as well as the trust and confidence bestowed on them by His Majesty the King, said the Home Minister.

In conclusion, the Home Minister said that, as submitted by the hon'ble members, while all civil servants must serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with total loyalty and dedication, it is the responsibility of the RCSC to carefully induct new recruits and train them. On behalf of the RCSC, he pledged that the Commission will strictly adhere to the laws of the land and the resolutions of the National Assembly in the course of discharging its responsibilities.

Royal Advisory Councillor Lungten Tshering pointed out that the decision to compulsorily retire relatives of ngolops from the civil service was taken by the 75th

Session of the National Assembly and was not a decision of His Majesty the King or the Royal Government. He expressed his deep appreciation to the Royal Civil Service Commission for successfully implementing the Assembly resolution which was based on the wisdom that “one should not reveal one’s precious possession to the dubious just as it is not safe to confide to those who have every reason to steal your secrets.” He requested the RCSC to continue implementing the resolutions of the National Assembly. However, since some family members might have no connections no matter how closely connected they may be, the relatives of ngolops who are compulsorily retired must be carefully scrutinized so that the problem is solved and not escalated.

The Dzongdas of Lhuentse and Bumthang Dzongkhags said that the Assembly members deeply appreciated the implementation of the resolutions of the Assembly on compulsory retirement of relatives of ngolops by the Royal Civil Service Commission. They pointed out that the issue had been thoroughly discussed during the 75th Session and it was not even a year since the resolution on the issue was passed. Therefore, they said that they did not see any reason to continue the discussions on the issue and suggested that the issue be dealt with in accordance with the resolutions of the previous sessions.

The Speaker reminded the members that the 75th Session of the National Assembly had passed the resolution on the relatives of ngolops after prolonged discussions over two days. The RCSC should, therefore, continue to function according to the national laws, established government policies, and the rules governing the civil service, keeping in mind the security of the country and the well-being of the people.

Accordingly, the Assembly resolved that the issue of compulsory retirement of relatives of ngolops from the civil service shall be dealt with in accordance with the resolution of the 75th Session of the National Assembly.

XIII. PARO TAKTSHANG

The following is a summary of the submissions made by the Chimis of Trashigang, Lhuentse, Pemagatshel, Punakha, Trashigang and Dagana, on behalf of the people of their Dzongkhags, on the fire which destroyed the Paro Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang:

The Chimis submitted that the fire at the sacred Lhakhang at Taktshang Pelphug, a site which was personally blessed by the Second Buddha, Ugyen Guru Rimpoche, had

brought profound sorrow to the people of Bhutan and left them with a very deep sense of loss which was also shared by many people all over the world. The tragic fire incident inflicted an irreparable religious and cultural loss to Bhutan and also deprived the world of one of its great cultural heritages. In the wake of this unfortunate disaster, religious bodies all across the country performed Kurims and offered prayers for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The Chimis expressed the deep appreciation of the people that the Taktshang Lhakhang will be restored to its full grandeur and excellence through the wise guidance of His Majesty the King. They also expressed their appreciation to friendly countries like India and Austria, and other parties who, out of their high regard for His Majesty and his enlightened leadership of Bhutan, have come forward with generous donations to restore one of the most important and sacred national heritages of the country. They also expressed their appreciation for the generous contributions made by devoted patrons and private individuals such as Dasho Ugyen Dorji for the reconstruction of the sacred Taktshang Lhakhang.

The Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang was renowned throughout the world and has stood as a religious pillar in Bhutan. It is a precious legacy from our illustrious forefathers and the eminent luminaries of the past to be held in trust for future generations. Therefore, the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang should not be left solely to the government. For this purpose, the people are ready to do their share as and when required. The Chimis requested the government for a report on the status of the investigations into the cause of the fire.

The Paro Chimi said that it was due to the ill fortune of the people that the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang was consumed by fire. However, although “good fortune had been lost by the Drey (big measure) it could still be measured by the Phueta (small measure).” The Lhakhang may have been destroyed by fire but its sanctity remains unspolied. His Majesty the King personally visited Taktshang and recovered the important relics and sacred treasures, many of which were undamaged, from the ruins of the Pelphug Lhakhang, His Majesty also commanded that the Lhakhang must be re-built and restored to its former glory.

The Chimi conveyed the appreciation of the people of Paro to the other Dzongkhags for their concern over the fire disaster and their support for the construction of a new

Lhakhang. He said that the people of Paro are ready to provide manpower for the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang and contribute in any other way.

The Thimphu Chimi said that the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang is one of the most important among the eight sacred sites that had been blessed by Ugyen Guru Rimpoche. The grief and the deep sense of loss felt by the Bhutanese people is shared by many others all over the world. The pledges of support made by the people all across the country is an auspicious start to the restoration work. Ultimately, what is of primary importance is that the sanctity of the Nye remains intact. It is indeed fortunate that the sacred Nangtens (inner treasures) were retrieved by His Majesty the King. With His Majesty's command to rebuild the Lhakhang, once the exterior works are completed by the nation's skilled craftsmen, and the Nangtens are re-installed and blessed, the Taktshang Pelphu Lhakhang will be as sacred as it has always been, inspiring wonder in the hearts of all beholders and radiating blessings on the country and all sentient beings.

The Chimis of Bumthang and Yangtse Dzongkhags said that the Great Master Pema Jungney, in his manifestation as Guru Dorji Droli, sanctified Taktshang Pelphug and stored away many Ters (secret treasures) in the Taktshang Pelphug Nye for the benefit of all sentient beings during the dark times to come. The destruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang by fire has brought deep sorrow to the people of Bhutan and a strong sense of loss in many other countries.

The Chimis proposed that the new Lhakhang should be built as an exact replica of the old Lhakhang as Taktshang Pelphug is one of the most sacred Nyes blessed by Guru Rimpoche. They also suggested that the best possible safety measures must be adopted to prevent such disasters in the future and to ensure the safety of some of the most precious and invaluable Nangtens of the country.

The Chimis of Tsirang, Pemagatshel, Mongar, Sarpang, Haa and Wangdue Phodrang Dzongkhags said that the fire disaster at the sacred Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang, a Nye which was personally visited and blessed by the Second Buddha, Ugyen Guru Rinpoche, has caused immense grief and concern among the people of all the Dzongkhags. They pointed out that the feelings of profound regret and the spontaneous support for the restoration of the Lhakhang, expressed in the National Assembly, indicates the continuing faith of the people in the precious teachings of the Dharma and its blessings on the country. Although the Pelphug Lhakhang has been consumed by fire, its important Nangtens have been recovered intact and, above all, the sacred site blessed by Guru

Rimpoché has not been damaged. This has been a source of great relief and comfort for the people.

The Chimis pointed out that because the thirteen important traditional arts and crafts (Zorig Chusum) of Bhutan are still intact and the people also came forward spontaneously when His Majesty the King commanded the renovation of the Punakha Dzong, this historic Dzong has been renovated and restored beyond its former grandeur in fulfillment of the royal command. Similarly, the people are unanimous in pledging their support, in terms of material or labour requirements, for the re-construction of the Pelphug Lhakhang. The Chimis also expressed the deep gratitude of the people to Bhutan's closest friend and neighbour, India and other friendly countries, and to the devoted patrons within the country for the generous contributions towards the re-construction of the Taktshang Lhakhang.

The representative of the Monk Body in the Royal Advisory Council said that the Taktshang Pelphug is one of the most sacred Nyes blessed by the second Buddha, Ugyen Guru Rimpoche. The destruction of the Pelphug Lhakhang by fire has, therefore, brought deep sorrow and concern to the people and to the religious community. However, due to the blessings of the Divine Guardians, the powerful merits of His Majesty the King and the good fortune of the people, the important Nangtens (sacred religious relics) were not damaged or lost, but were retrieved by His Majesty the King with His own hands. The deep concern and grief of the people over the burning of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang has been greatly eased by this good Tendrel of the sacred Nangtens being recovered personally by His Majesty the King.

He expressed the deep gratitude of the religious community to His Majesty the King for commanding the Pelphug Lhakhang to be re-built and restored to its full splendour and glory. He also expressed the deep appreciation of the religious community to Bhutan's close neighbour, India and other friendly countries, and to Dasho Ugyen Dorji of Tashi Commercial Corporation for making generous financial contributions for the re-construction of the sacred Pelphug Lhakhang.

He reminded the members of Kuenkhen Rimpoche's prayer,

As the true source of benefit and comfort,
May the teachings of the Dharma flourish in perpetuity.

Lasting benefits and comfort in our world are those which are derived from the precious teachings of the Dharma. The fact that everyone in the country is united in the wish to preserve and promote the Buddha-Dharma is indeed a most propitious Tendrel.

Presenting his views on the issue, the Home Minister said that everyone, including His Majesty the King, deeply regretted the damage by fire to one of the most important among the numerous sacred Nyes which Guru Rimpoche had visited and blessed. He reported that the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang was burnt down on 19th April, 1998. However, the essence of the monastery's sacredness, the Dubkhang (the sacred cave where Guru Rimpoche meditated), and the most important Nangtens were found intact. The Dubkhang is still in the same condition as it always had been and the Nangtens have been recovered, he reported.

The minister informed the Assembly that the Yeshey Semba (sacred innermost relic) of the Guru Sungjoen along with the main image itself had been personally retrieved by His Majesty the King during His visit to the Taktshang Pelphug, immediately after the fire. Following the salvage operations and recovery works, commanded by His Majesty, many other sacred relics were recovered and saved. He said that the sacred relics of Guru Rimpoche's disciple, Langchen Pelgyi Singye, which had been enshrined deep in the rocks of the Taktshang Pelphug was unaffected by the fire. Besides, one of the most important Nangtens of Taktshang Lhakhang, the Phurpai Kilkhor had been found with all the 130 Phurpas (religious daggers) in good condition except for one.

The minister informed the Assembly that, following the royal command to start the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang as soon as possible, the drawings and a model are currently being prepared and arrangements are being made to collect the timber, stones and other construction materials for the Lhakhang. The Special Commission hopes to start the reconstruction early next year after the passing of the Lona (inauspicious year), he said. The minister assured the hon'ble members that the government will make every effort to ensure that the Taktshang Pelphu Lhakhang is restored to its former beauty and glory. He gave his assurance that the work will be done to the full satisfaction of His Majesty the King, the government and the people of Bhutan.

He informed the members that, in the meantime, the Royal Bhutan Police had carried out detailed investigations into the fire. However, since the Royal Bhutan Police does not have forensic facilities and expertise, the Government of India had kindly assisted in the investigation by sending three of their senior most forensic experts to determine the cause of the fire. They had taken samples, including pieces of charred bones, as well as various materials from the ruins of the caretaker's room and the Guru Lhakhang. According to their report, all the sample bones belonged to the late caretaker, Damcho. He said that the reports from the laboratory tests of the samples collected from the Lhakhang and the caretaker's room showed traces of nitrate, sulphate and chlorate, indicating evidence of low explosives (gun powder). The Home Minister informed the house that the investigation report and findings of the Royal Bhutan Police have confirmed that the fire at Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang, and the death of the caretaker, was a result of sabotage and murder by evil persons to disturb and alarm the Bhutanese people.

The fire at Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang was first seen by Anim Chhoden from the Zangthopelri Lhakhang which is directly above the Taktshang Pelphug. According to her eye-witness statement, there were initially two fires at different places, one at the caretaker's room and the other at the Guru Lhakhang. Anim Choden had confirmed that the flames did not spread for about half-an hour. The open space of at least 20 meters between these two parts of the monastery rule out accidental cause of fire, such as spilling of butter lamps.

The initial theory that the two explosions heard by people coming to put out the fire was caused by gas cylinders has been completely ruled out. The caretaker had two gas cylinders. However, one had been sent down for refilling in Paro town several days before the fire while the other was found intact amongst the ruins. The main door of the Lhakhang, which is next to the caretaker's room, was seen to be wide open by the villagers who first arrived at the scene. The caretaker could have escaped the fire because it had started as early as 7.00 p.m when he would not have been asleep. All this indicates that the caretaker must have been murdered before the fire broke out.

The minister also informed the members that the burnt remains of about Nu.1,00,000 in cash inside a metal box belonging to the caretaker and all his belongings, as well as a solid gold butter lamp and many silver Choechhas (religious items) which were kept with him were found amongst the ruins of his room. This clearly shows that the caretaker had made no attempt to take out any of these items or escape the fire. The reports of the three Indian forensic experts on the scientific analysis of the various samples taken from Taktshang and the investigation report of the Royal Bhutan Police have confirmed that

the caretaker, Damchoe was murdered and the fire was a result of sabotage. However, the Home Minister said that he could not comment on who was responsible without further evidence or information.

The Tshenyi Lopen said that the renowned Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang, built about three hundred years ago, had not suffered any damage until this year, and the fire disaster had greatly alarmed the people. However, if one reflects on the matter, the true sanctity of Taktshang is the sacred Dubkhang where Guru Rimpoche meditated. Since the Dubkhang cannot be destroyed or damaged unless the whole cliff at Taktshang collapses there is no need for alarm, he said.

Secondly, the Kudung (mummified remains) of Langchen Pelgyi Singye, one of Ugyen Guru Rimpoche's twenty five excellent disciples, and the second most important Nangten of Taktshang Pelphug, is safe and intact. There may be many people who feel that the sanctity and blessings of the sacred Nye at Taktshang may have been reduced by the destruction of the Lhakhang by fire. However, the fact that the Bhutanese people have all come forward with spontaneous pledges of support for the immediate re-construction of the Taktshang Lhakhang clearly shows that we have all been moved by our concern and desire to preserve the sanctity and scared aura of Taktshang Pelphug. This is in itself a clear evidence that the sacred aura and sanctity emanating from Taktshang Pelphug remains as strong as ever.

The Tshenyi Lopen informed the members that the sacred religious relics (Ku-Sung-Thuktens) were retrieved without damage by His Majesty the King when He visited the Taktshang Pelphug, accompanied by representatives of the Monk Body and senior government officials. On behalf of the Clergy, the Tshenyi Lopen expressed his deep appreciation to the people of all the Dzongkhags for their pledge to contribute manpower, money and any other material resources for the re-construction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang. He also expressed the deep appreciation of the Clergy for the generous contributions made by friendly countries and patrons from within the Kingdom.

Speaking on the issue, the Finance Minister said that it is not only the people of Bhutan who are grieved by the fire at the sacred Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang, but also the government and people of other countries. They have sent many letters of condolence, while some have made financial contributions. The Royal Government, he said, is grateful for the concerns and support given by such friends and well wishers. He said that the scared Nye, also called the Dubkhang, is the most important aspect of Taktshang as

the Lhakhang was built because of its existence. He pointed out that as the sacred Dubkhang is intact, the Lhakhang can be reconstructed excelling its former splendour and glory. He recalled that His Majesty the King has also commanded that the Nangtens should be installed as they were in the past.

The Finance Minister also informed the hon'ble members that His Majesty has commanded that the government and the people of Bhutan should assume full responsibility for the construction of the Paro Taktshang Lhakhang, and that we should not seek assistance from other countries. He stated, however, that while Bhutan will not seek external assistance, we are none-the-less grateful for any donation from friendly countries and individuals.

The Paro Dzongda expressed his gratitude to all those who, on the command of His Majesty the King, came from Paro and Thimphu to help during the fire. The Dzongda informed the Assembly members that as soon as the Taktshang Lhakhang caught on fire, His Majesty the King had commanded that the Nangtens must be saved at all cost. About 500 to 600 people were engaged in fighting the fire but, because of Taktshang's location on a sheer cliff, it had been impossible to put out the fire. His Majesty climbed to Taktshang immediately after the fire and retrieved the Nangtens and the Guru Sungjoen from the Dubkhang, the sacred cave where Guru Rimpoche had meditated in the 8th century. The Nangtens and the Guru Sungjoen were placed in the Namsey Lhakhang by His Majesty personally. The following day when the concerned officials removed the Guru Sungjoen for restoration works, there was a heavy wind-storm as the sacred image was carried to the main doorway. Taking this as a sign that the Guru Sungjoen should not be removed from the premises of the sacred Nye at Taktshang, it was placed back in the Namsey Lhakhang. The wind and rain stopped immediately, the sun shone brightly and a rainbow formed over the Lhakhang which housed the Guru Sungjoen. The rainbow remained in position for a long time. This was witnessed by all the people in the area in awe and wonder and with devotion. The hon'ble members may be assured that these wondrous signs clearly show that the sacred aura and sanctity of Taktshang Pelphug has not been diminished by the fire.

On the same lines, the Minister for Trade and Industry submitted that His Majesty the King had commanded that as soon as the Lona ends, the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang should commence. For this task, the main requirement is funds and in this connection he expressed his appreciation and gratitude to those Bhutanese, as well as

the friendly countries and outside organizations, who have made generous contributions towards the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang. He went on to submit that the Special Commission, while recognizing the need to construct a road to carry materials from the valley to Taktshang, had decided not to construct a motorable road but to install a ropeway instead, bearing in mind the harmful effects a road may bring to such a sacred place. He submitted that the contributions received so far were sufficient only to meet the cost of the ropeway.

The minister submitted that the responsibility of reconstructing the Taktshang Lhakhang rested with the government and the people of Bhutan and, as such, all of us are blessed with the opportunity to contribute to the reconstruction of a most sacred and historical national heritage like the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang.

The Speaker noted that the destruction by fire of the sacred Lhakhang in Taktshang Pelphug, the holy site blessed by Ugyen Guru Rimpoche, has evoked the deepest sense of loss among the Bhutanese people and many others all over the world. Although the physical structure of the Lhakhang has been destroyed, the fact that numerous Ku-Sung-Thuktens have been recovered in good condition is an auspicious sign that inspires deep faith. The pledges of total support from the people of all 20 Dzongkhags for the reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang is a matter of pride and satisfaction for the National Assembly. Regarding the reconstruction of the Lhakhang, His Majesty the King has already commanded that it must surpass the earlier Lhakhang and, accordingly, as soon as the Lona comes to a close, reconstruction works will commence in full conformity with our age-old traditions of the thirteen traditional arts and crafts.

The deliberations concluded with the National Assembly expressing its hope and prayers for the successful reconstruction of the Taktshang Pelphug Lhakhang in fulfillment of the wishes and expectations of His Majesty the King, the religious community and the government and people of Bhutan.

XIV. ADDITIONAL SECURITY FOR NGANGLAM

The public of Nganglam Dungkhag in Samdrupjongkhar Dzongkhag expressed their deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for establishing one RBA company at Nganglam for the security of the general public. The people of Nganglam requested for additional

security forces, if it is possible, in view of the deteriorating law and order situation in and around Nganglam.

The Punakha Chimi said that under the wise guidance of His Majesty the King, the three service forces have discharged their responsibilities with dedication and maintained the peace and security of the country, which is a source of much satisfaction for the people.

He noted that because the ULFA and Bodo militants from Assam posed a serious threat to life and property in Nganglam, the government had established a military camp in the Dungkhag. He also appreciated that the request of the people of Nganglam for additional security forces is both genuine and important. However, as the problems in Nganglam are due to the militants from Assam, it will be unrealistic for Bhutan, with a small population and a small security force, to try and overcome these problems through military strength. Bhutan cannot hope to solve a problem which is really a problem in India although the issue is of great concern to us because it poses a grave security threat to our country, he said. According to him, the only solution is to request India, which has always been a close friend and neighbour, to tackle the problem within India.

The Goongloen Gongma informed the Assembly members that on 27th September 1997, when four police personnel were killed and three others were injured by some miscreants, His Majesty the King visited Nganglam the same day to personally assess the security situation. Following the visit, and out of deep concern for the safety of the public, His Majesty commanded the immediate establishment of a security post at Nganglam. Accordingly, one security outpost was immediately opened at Nanglam. His Majesty also subsequently commanded that new accommodations be constructed for the troops to facilitate the discharge of their duties, and that reinforcements be deployed in addition to the troops already stationed at Nganglam. Both these commands have been fulfilled, he said.

Similarly, with a view to ensure the safety of the people, His Majesty has commanded the opening of security outposts at Phibsoo, Kalikhola, Sarpang, and in Kikhorthang and Tsokhana under Tsirang Dzongkhag. Wing IX has since been located at Lodrai in Gelephu Dungkhag, providing security for the people of Gelephu, Dhanabari, Kalikhola, Lalai and Surey. Further, following the handing over of the Dantak Headquarters complex in Deothang to the RBA on 15th August 1997, Wing X has been established at Deothang. On His Majesty's command, additional construction of troop accommodation

at Deothang is currently being undertaken. The Goongloen Gongma gave his assurance that the three service forces will continue to do everything in their power to ensure the security of the country, and serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with unwavering loyalty and dedication.

The Chimi of Silambi Geog in Mongar Dzongkhag submitted that the areas under Silambi and Gongdue in Mongar, and Dogar in Zhemgang Dzongkhag are potential problem areas with the possibility of infiltration by the ULFA and Bodo militants. He said that the people in these areas are very concerned over the potential threat from these militants. The people would, therefore, be most relieved and grateful if additional security forces could be deployed.

Addressing the Assembly, His Majesty the King said that, due to limited accommodation, there are presently only 25 policemen and 60 soldiers stationed at Nganglam. Besides the safety of the people in the area, the security situation in Nganglam is very important for the implementation of the Dungsam Cement Project, one of the four mega projects in the Eighth Plan. A budget of about Nu.4,000 million for the industry, which will produce about 1,500 metric tones of cement per day, has been provided as a grant by the Government of India. The Indian government has already disbursed Nu. 1,000 million for the project and the construction of road and electricity facilities have begun. The success of this project could be seriously effected by the presence of the militants in the area.

His Majesty informed the members that there are many armed militants in the forests of Nganglam and they are occupying areas which have become inaccessible and risky for the local Bhutanese population. They have gone to the extent of declaring certain areas out of bounds for the local population and the Forestry personnel. The local people are finding it difficult to even graze their cattle because the militants have restricted the use of grazing grounds also. It is in view of the serious security situation in Nganglam that the people have requested for additional security forces to be posted in the Dungkhag.

His Majesty explained that it is a misconception that the stationing of additional troops in troubled areas will by itself resolve the problem. If troops are sent to all the troubled areas the risk of confrontation and conflict will increase and there is every possibility that the problem will escalate. It is, therefore, important for the National Assembly to give careful consideration to this security issue. His Majesty informed the members that

construction work on the establishment of an army camp at Nganglam, at an estimated cost of Nu.42 million, had commenced last year.

The Tsirang Chimi submitted that the ULFA and Bodo militants have not only created problems in their own state of Assam but, having illegally infiltrated into Bhutanese territory, they are causing serious problems for the peace loving people of Bhutan. He said that it is an act which cannot be tolerated. However, as His Majesty the King has explained, the deployment of security forces alone will not solve the problem. Since these militants are Indian citizens the only option is for the governments of India and Bhutan to find a solution through dialogue.

The Dzongda of Samdrupjongkhar submitted that the serious security problems caused by the presence of the ULFA and Bodo militants in the Dzongkhag had been discussed many times in the District Development Committee. As the security situation is most serious in Nganglam, His Majesty the King had posted security forces to protect the lives and property of the local population and the existing infrastructure in Nganglam Dungkhag. However, as Nganglam is the site of the Dungsam Cement Project, generously financed by the Indian government, additional security will be required exclusively for the project, if it is to be successfully established within the Eighth Plan. This is the reason why the people have requested for additional security in Nganglam, he said. The Dzongda, however, cautioned that posting additional troops might sometimes aggravate the problem. Keeping in mind the fact that Bhutan has a very small security force, it is not possible to post large numbers of security personnel in every place where there is a problem.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Thimphu Chimi submitted that they fully appreciated and realized the problems regarding deployment of security forces as explained by His Majesty the King. However, regarding the security situation in Nganglam, they submitted that the Dungsam Cement Project is a very important industry which will provide gainful employment and work for the present besides being a good investment for the future. Since the successful establishment of the industry does not seem to be possible without adequate security, they requested for additional security forces to be posted at Nganglam.

The National Assembly noted that the people of Nganglam had requested for additional security forces because of the serious threat posed by the ULFA and Bodo militants to

the life and property of the people and the successful implementation of the Dungsam Cement Project. In the course of the deliberation, the views and thoughts of His Majesty the King, the steps taken by the security forces, and the hopes and aspirations of the people were clearly understood by all the Assembly members.

The National Assembly, noting that merely increasing the strength of the security forces will not guarantee more security but could even create more problems, decided that the reinforcement of the security in Nganglam should be undertaken in accordance to His Majesty's assessment of the situation in the area.

XV. SECURITY FOR HIS MAJESTY THE KING

The public of Doteng and Wangchang, Hungrel, Lunyi, Lamgong and Tsento geogs in Paro Dzongkhag submitted their deep concern over the personal security of His Majesty the King. They pointed out that His Majesty, without regard to his own personal comfort and safety and in the sole interest of the country and the people, has been traveling frequently in the high-risk troubled areas affected by the ngolop problem and the presence of the ULFA-Bodo militants.

It is fortunate for the people that no harm has come to His Majesty the King due to His Majesty's own good fortune and the loyal services of the security forces. However, the people appealed to His Majesty not to personally visit the high risk areas but to delegate the concerned officers to carry out the necessary tasks. If at all, for some vital reasons, His Majesty has to visit the disturbed areas, the security measures must be strengthened to the maximum level. They proposed that special security training must be carried out for the most able and selected personnel of the Royal Body Guards (RBG) the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) and the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP), and the number of security personnel guarding His Majesty must be increased to ensure the best possible security.

The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Goongloen Gongma Lam Dorji said the security forces also shared the people's concern for the personal security of His Majesty the King who has been regularly visiting the disturbed and high risk areas without the slightest regard to his own safety. The presence of the ULFA and Bodo militants inside our country has further heightened our concern for the safety of His Majesty, he said.

The Goongloen Gongma reminded the Assembly that His Majesty personally took on the full responsibility for national security during both the ngolop problem and in the current situation to ensure the peace and well-being of the Bhutanese people.

During the height of the ngolop problem in 1990, His genuine concern for the country and the people had taken His Majesty the King to every remote corner of the disturbed regions. His Majesty travelled by air, by road and even on foot to reach the remotest villages and to see to the well-being of the people. His Majesty also personally met the security forces and gave them the moral support to carry out their responsibilities.

The Goongloen Gongma assured the Assembly that the security forces will take the full responsibility for the personal safety and security of His Majesty the King. At the same time, he called upon the people to place their faith and confidence in the security forces to face and overcome the security threats to the country.

The Chimis of Punakha and Haa Dzongkhags said that the personal safety of His Majesty the King is of paramount importance as His Majesty is both the inner precious jewel and the outer protective wall of the Palden Drukpa, the source of Kidu for the needy, and a parent to every Bhutanese. His Majesty has been regularly visiting the disturbed areas, in the interest of the nation and the people, without thinking about his personal safety. Expressing their appreciation to the security forces for their dedicated service in ensuring His Majesty's personal safety, the Chimi said that the Bhutanese people have been fortunate that nothing untoward has happened. The Chimis also expressed their happiness and satisfaction over the assurance given by the Goongloen Gongma that the three service forces will take the full responsibility for the personal security of His Majesty the King. The Chimis appealed to His Majesty not to visit the disturbed and high security risk areas. They, however, realized that His Majesty, out of his deep concern and commitment to the interest and well-being of the country and the people, will insist on visiting the problem areas. They called upon the security forces to pay special attention and take extra care in providing the maximum level of security during such visits.

The Thimphu Chimi said that because of the close bond of love and loyalty between His Majesty the King and the people, and because His Majesty looks after the people better than we look after our own children, the sun of peace, happiness and prosperity has been shining on our country. The Bhutanese people in all walks of life, both young and old, must deeply appreciate and cherish the love and affection His Majesty has bestowed on

his people. He called upon the Clergy to offer prayers for the long life and glorious reign of His Majesty the King and the three service forces to continue looking after His Majesty's personal security with the utmost dedication.

Similarly, the Dzongdas of Sarpang and Lhuentse Dzongkhags said that, since the ngolop uprising in 1990, His Majesty has made more than 25 visits to the disturbed areas in the southern Dzongkhag. It has been noticed that, with each visit, the number of security personnel has been reduced and it is now learnt that the security contingent was being reduced on the command of His Majesty the King himself.

They strongly submitted that the royal guest houses where His Majesty resides during His visits to the southern Dzongkhags do not offer adequate security, some being located in towns and others near the highways. His Majesty must be constantly accompanied by security troops in adequate numbers on these royal visits to the high security risk areas.

They also pointed out that His Majesty's personal safety should not be left to the security forces alone but all Bhutanese citizens must think and act as one with total loyalty to the Tsa-Wa-Sum, without being swayed in any way by any evil influences. The religious bodies in the country, under the guidance of the Central Monastic Body, should also offer prayers to the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa for the safety and well-being of His Majesty the King.

The National Assembly placed on record that His Majesty the King is both the inner jewel and the outer protective wall of the country and the respected leader as well as a beloved parent to whom the Bhutanese people owe everything. Until now, due to His Majesty's own good fortune and the dedicated service of the security forces, nothing untoward has happened and His Majesty continues to grace the golden throne with his glorious presence. Expressing appreciation to the security forces, and noting the assurance given by the Goongloen Gongma, the National Assembly called upon the Royal Body Guards, the Royal Bhutan Army and the Royal Bhutan Police to take all necessary measures to look after the personal security of His Majesty the King with the utmost loyalty and dedication. For their part, the Clergy, civil servants and the people must extend their unwavering loyalty and full confidence to His Majesty the King and give full moral support to the security forces in discharging their important responsibilities.

XVI. OATH OF ALLEGIANCE TO THE TSA-WA-SUM

The public of Trashy Yangtse Dzongkhag submitted that, a year ago, a few evil persons who had failed to succeed in religious practices as well as worldly activities, tried to disturb the peace and harmony of the country after accepting bribes of a few hundred Ngultrum from the ngolops outside the country. However, they failed in their treacherous activity because the general public are steadfast in their loyalty to the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The people of Trashy Yangtse Dzongkhag are firm in their love and loyalty to His Majesty the King and the Tsa-Wa-Sum and condemn the false propaganda of the ngolops. The people of Trashy Yangtse stand strongly by the pledge and commitment made by our forefathers in 1907 at Punakha and would like to re-affirm this solemn pledge of loyalty and support to the cherished system of hereditary monarchy.

The Chimi of Tongshang and Jamkhar geogss in Trashy Yangtse Dzongkhag pointed out that, due to the blessings of the Guardian Deities, the wise leadership of His Majesty the King and the collective good fortune of the people, Bhutan has been enjoying peace, prosperity and happiness. As the saying goes, “an evil person harms the country while a troublesome bird disturbs the coop,” a few evil persons who had failed at religious and worldly pursuits, had taken bribes of Nu.100 to Nu.200 from the ngolops outside the country and became involved in activities against the Tsa-Wa-Sum. However, the seven Gomchens involved in such activities were immediately seized by the public who are loyal and dedicated to the Tsa-Wa-Sum and they were handed over to the police. He submitted that these persons must be punished very strictly and said that the people of Trashy Yangtse reiterated their pledge of allegiance to His Majesty the King.

The National Assembly noted that the people of Trashy Yangtse deeply regretted that a few persons from their Dzongkhag, who had taken bribes from the ngolops outside the country, had been involved in ngolop activities. The National Assembly recorded its satisfaction and appreciation that the people of Trashy Yangtse had come forward to re-affirm their unwavering faith and loyalty to His Majesty the King and the cherished institution of hereditary monarchy.

XVII. PALACE FOR HIS MAJESTY THE KING

The public of Tashi Yangtse Dzongkhag submitted that the citizens of Bhutan, of all walks of life, are living in increasingly comfortable houses because of their growing

income and prosperity. The people are receiving the benefits of never ending development programmes and facilities like the perennial water flowing down the rivers. All of this has been possible because of the hard work and wise leadership of His Majesty the King.

It is a source of much regret for the people to see that, even after 26 years on the golden throne, a suitable palace has not been built for His Majesty the King while, within the same period, His Majesty has personally steered the country towards unprecedented socio-economic progress and prosperity. The people of Trashigang would like to propose that a suitable palace must be built for His Majesty the King as a mark of gratitude for His Majesty's selfless commitment and efforts to promote the welfare of the Bhutanese people.

The Speaker pointed out that, as the Assembly members are well aware, over the past 26 years of His reign, His Majesty the King had selflessly strived to promote the well-being and interests of the people and the country without taking any interest in His own comfort. Proposals for a suitable palace for His Majesty had been made in the past by the government officials and the people. However, leave alone the construction of a palace, His Majesty the King does not even approve the procurement of new vehicles to replace the old vehicles in the royal garage or even the regular maintenance and re-furbishing of the log cabin in which He resides.

The Speaker informed the Assembly members that when he apprised His Majesty the King about this particular item on the agenda, His Majesty had commanded that the National Assembly should deliberate on issues of national concern and importance instead of discussing such matters like the building of a palace. The Speaker, therefore, closed the discussions since His Majesty desired that the issue should not be discussed.

XVIII. ISSUES RELATED TO ULFA-BODO PROBLEM

The people of the 202 geogs in the 20 Dzongkhags of Bhutan and the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry submitted various points requesting the Royal Government to explore all possible ways to resolve the Bodo-ULFA problem and, for their part, pledged their full support, in terms of material resources and manpower requirements.

The members, expressing their deep appreciation for the rapid socio-economic development that Bhutan had achieved within a very short period of time under the wise

and selfless rule of His Majesty the King, pointed out that it would not be possible for the Bhutanese people to enjoy the fruits of these achievements without ensuring the peace and security of the country. The ULFA and Bodo militants who had established camps in the forests inside Bhutan were well equipped with modern weapons and had a lot of resources and manpower. The increasing presence of these militants inside Bhutan's border areas posed a grave threat to the security and sovereignty of the country. The members pointed out that since these militants are Indian citizens from Assam and their problem is with the Indian government, and as the saying goes, "the wound in one's mouth should be taken care of and treated by oneself," it is the responsibility of the Government of India to take immediate measures to resolve the problem with their own people.

Although the close and abiding relations between India and Bhutan is to be deeply appreciated, the infiltration of the ULFA and Bodo militants into Bhutan has adverse effects on Bhutan's socio-economic development and, above all, on the security of the country. Noting that His Majesty the King and the Royal Government has taken the full responsibility to resolve this problem and every possibility is being explored to this end, the members pledged the full support of the people in resolving this problem in any manner that may be required.

The Chimis of Lhuentse, Wangdue Phodrang and Zhemgang Dzongkhags said that Bhutan and India have been very close and friendly neighbours since long time back and the people of the eastern Dzongkhags have also been enjoying very friendly relations with the people of Assam. Because of the close friendship between the two countries and people, the Chimis said that it is the responsibility of the Government of India and the ULFA and Bodo militants to resolve their problems with each other and ensure that no threat is posed to a friendly neighbouring country and its people.

The Chimis expressed deep concern over the presence of the ULFA-Bodo militants on Bhutanese soil which posed a grave threat to the security of the country. However, unlike in 1990 when the responsibility of resolving the ngolop problem was left upto His Majesty the King alone, this time the government and people must work together to find a way to resolve the Bodo-ULFA problem. It is important to carefully consider all possible solutions to the problem. There is, also, every possibility that the ngolops in Jhapa, Nepal will link up with the Bodo-ULFA militants and try to harm the country. If this problem

cannot be resolved through peaceful means, and the security of the country is threatened, the people stand ready to sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to protect their country.

The Pemagatshel Chimi said that the people must share the burden of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem which was being handled by His Majesty the King and the government. He submitted that the people of his Dzongkhag, including the business community, have not assisted the militants by selling food or providing transportation. He said that the people gave their pledge not to help the militants in any way and requested the Royal Government to expedite the departure of these militants from Bhutanese soil through dialogue with the Government of India. For their part, the people pledged their full support and loyalty to protect the security of the country.

The Chimis of Trongsa, Mongar and Trashigang Dzongkhags said that the presence of the ULFA and Bodo militants on Bhutanese soil is a threat to the age-old friendship between India and Bhutan, and poses both short term and long term problems for the country. As the problem is still in the initial stage they suggested that the Royal Government should try to resolve the problem through dialogue with the Government of India. Even more important, a solution should be worked out through dialogue between the Government of India and the militants who are Indian citizens. For their part, the Chimis said that the people pledge to firmly support any step taken by the Royal Government, even at the cost of their lives.

The Tsirang Chimi said that the people of his Dzongkhag were deeply concerned over the intrusion and harmful activities by the ULFA and Bodo militants inside the eastern Dzongkhags. They requested the government to remove these militants immediately through dialogue with the Indian government. Since Assam is a part of India, and given the abiding friendship between India and Bhutan, it should be possible for an amicable solution to be found.

These armed militants have taken advantage of the open and porous border which Bhutan shares with India and have entered our country, he said. They have used the dense jungles to set up their camps and even carry out military training. This poses a grave threat to the security and sovereignty of our country. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the ULFA and Bodo militants are removed from Bhutanese territory through peaceful means such as dialogue with the Government of India and the State Government of Assam. It is

important that whatever solution is worked out, it should not disturb the peace, sovereignty and security of our country, he said.

The Punakha Chimi said that it is difficult to determine which vehicles are being used to transport the arms and ammunitions of the ULFA and Bodo militants who have established camps inside Bhutan. While appreciating the steps take by the government to check the vehicles passing through the various entry points, he requested for stricter checks to be carried out at all the checkpoints. He pointed out that, like the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan in 1990, ngolops against the Tsa-Wa-Sum had surfaced in three eastern Dzongkhags in 1997. He, therefore, suspected that there would be ngolops in all the eastern Dzongkhags and some of them might be helping the militants in transporting their supplies. He suggested that investigations should be carried out and any person found to be helping the militants should be punished according to the law. If peaceful means do not succeed in removing the militants from our soil, the people are ready to extend their full support for any other measures taken by the government and even sacrifice their lives to protect the security of the country, he said.

The Trashigang Yangtse Chimi submitted that a handful of people were believed to be helping transport food and supplies for the militants who paid high rates. He said that the Gups and Chimis of Trashigang Yangtse have been warning the people against helping outsiders for money. Regarding the problem of the ULFA and Bodo militants, we the people of Trashigang Yangtse would like to pledge our full support, in terms of manpower and material resources as may be required by the government, to protect the peace and security of our country, he said.

Intervening in the deliberations, His Majesty the King said that contrary to the submissions of some of the members, there is a big difference between the ngolop problem which arose in southern Bhutan and the incidences which occurred in the eastern Dzongkhags last year. From Kurtey in the north to Samdrupjongkhar in the south, there are six eastern Dzongkhags with a total of 66 geogs. Out of this a mere 129 people had been instigated and had accepted bribes from the ngolops based outside the country. Therefore, it is not correct or fair to categorise all Eastern Bhutanese as ngolops. His Majesty pointed out that, with the passage of time and influenced by the practice in other countries, the giving and taking of bribes is becoming a problem in the bigger towns of Bhutan like the capital, Thimphu.

Just because 129 persons had taken bribes from the ngolops outside the country, some of the members are terming all our people in the eastern Dzongkhags as ngolops. If such things are repeated frequently enough it will come to be believed. His Majesty, therefore, requested the hon'ble members to make a distinction between people accepting bribes and people who are ngolops against the Tsa-Wa-Sum while deliberating on such matters in the august hall of the National Assembly.

The Samdrupjongkhar Chimi submitted that the people of his Dzongkhag are deeply concerned that the ULFA and Bodo militants had infiltrated and established camps in the jungles of Samdrupjongkhar. He strongly refuted allegations in some sections of the outside media that the Bhutanese people are aiding these militants and said that these militants have neither been invited nor given shelter by the government or the people. He pointed out that the militants have been able to establish camps inside Bhutan because of the long and porous border which Bhutan shares with the Indian state of Assam.

The people in the villages are facing great inconvenience and harassment from the ULFA and Bodo militants who could also have an undesirable influence on the local Bhutanese youth. Moreover, the people are deeply concerned that the ngolops in Nepal will join hands with these militants to harm our country. It is our opinion that, whether they are ULFAs or Bodos, the fact is that these militants are Indian citizens, said the Chimi. Therefore, they should resolve their problems through dialogue with their government.

The Paro Chimi and the Gasa Chimi submitted that vigilance and scrutiny at the various checkpoints must be further tightened to stop the militants crossing the border, and any Bhutanese found to be helping the militants to transport their supplies must be punished strictly. The Gasa Chimi said that, Bhutan being a small country, the militants could easily block the roads and rob and terrorise Bhutanese people travelling through Assam. The Paro Chimi said that if it is not possible to find ways and means to make these militants leave Bhutanese soil peacefully, and if it becomes necessary to resort to other means, the people are ready to even sacrifice their lives, if necessary, to safeguard the security of the country.

If a peaceful solution is not possible, the Eighth Plan budget should be used to purchase arms, and militia training should be given to all men ranging from the age of 18 to 60 years. The Bodo-ULFA problem is becoming more and more serious now. We would like to request His Majesty the King to provide the guidance, as before, in finding a

solution to this problem. For our part, we wish to give our pledge that we stand ready to do anything that may be required of us without any hesitation whatsoever.

The Chukha Chimi and the Thimphu Chimi expressed the deep concern of the people over the infiltration of the Bodo and ULFA militants into Bhutan. They suggested that, given the close friendship between India and Bhutan, the Indian government should put pressure on the State Government of Assam to find a political solution to the problem with the militants. However, if it comes to the worst, the people are ready to defend the country and protect its security. They said that the security of the country must be safeguarded first so that development programmes can then be implemented peacefully.

The ULFA and Bodo militants have established camps inside Bhutan without any regard for its sovereignty. Given the fact that they are well equipped and armed it will be difficult to confront them militarily. However, if resorting to such means becomes necessary to protect the security of the country, the people wish to reiterate their pledge to defend the country under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King.

The Dagana Chimi and the Samtse Chimi said that the people are disappointed and disturbed by the remarks of the Defence Minister and Home Minister of India that Bhutan has given shelter and allowed training camps for Bodo and ULFA militants in eastern Bhutan. The truth is that the Indian security forces have chased the Bodo and ULFA militants into Bhutan which could not stop them. This has undermined the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a small and peaceful neighbouring country like Bhutan.

Moreover, the ULFA and Bodo militants, who are suspected to be hand in glove with the ngolops, have murdered, looted and terrorised the Bhutanese people. At the same time, the Indian security forces are also continuing to harass the Bhutanese people travelling through Assam. The people, therefore, appeal to His Majesty the King to kindly take up the matter with the Prime Minister of India and the Indian government to ease the suffering of the Bhutanese people by creating a conducive atmosphere for making the ULFA and Bodo militants return to their own country.

In this connection, the Minister for Trade and Industry noted that many of the Assembly members had expressed the need to remove the ULFA and Bodo related problems to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the country. Supporting the concerns of the people in the event the problem is not resolved, he submitted that trade and industrial activities would be affected in twelve Dzongkhags stretching from Kalikhola to Daifam as

all movement of vehicles, passengers, commercial and industrial goods through Assam would be exposed to high risks.

He pointed out that whenever there are political problems in Assam, the Bodo and ULFA militants call for strikes which bring all movement of vehicles to a complete halt. Last year, when the Royal Bhutan Police in Samdrupjongkhar arrested a Bodo militant for extorting money from the business community, the people of Assam retaliated by blocking all roads to Samdrupjongkhar causing much inconvenience to both the government and people. It must be borne in mind that in the event the people of Assam decide to restrict movement of Bhutanese vehicles through Assam, then the only link between India and Bhutan would be through Phuentsholing. In such a situation, he said, all our exports and imports through other routes would be affected. In addition, the Kurichu and Dungsam Projects which are manifestations of the most cordial and friendly relations between India and Bhutan, with a total investment of over Nu.8,000 million and which would make substantial contributions to our country's development, would also be affected.

For example, in 1995, from Kalikhola to Daifam, the FCB auctioned cash crops worth Nu.39 million excluding the cash crops directly sold by our farmers to Indian traders which if incorporated may double the value of the sales conducted by the FCB. In 1996, the FCB auctioned Nu.45 million worth of cash crops. In the event the trade routes are disrupted, not only will our policy of enhancing the income of our people through development of cash crops be affected but all development of government and private industries will be hampered. Moreover, import of commodities which are not available in the country including essential food items and petroleum products would also be affected. As such, the minister requested the hon'ble members to bear in mind the concerns of the Trade and Industry Ministry while discussing the Bodo-ULFA related problems.

The Chimis of Thimphu, Haa and Zhemgang Dzongkhags said that the issue of the Bodo and ULFA militants has been raised in the National Assembly because the people of all the 20 Dzongkhags are deeply concerned over the problem. They pointed out that Bhutan and India have always enjoyed very close, brotherly relations, and that India has extended generous development assistance to Bhutan for which the Bhutanese people are very grateful. Therefore, the two governments should discuss the problem of the ULFA and Bodo militants, who have illegally entered and established camps in Bhutan, and work out a solution to make these militants return to their own country.

At the same time, it must be kept in mind that the security and sovereignty of the country can be ensured only if the people also play their part. People in all walks of life, including shopkeepers and villagers, can contribute towards resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem if they think about the security of the country instead of their own individual interests and refuse to extend any form of assistance to the militants.

The president of the Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) expressed his deep appreciation to all the members of the National Assembly, the representatives of the Clergy and the government, the Royal Advisory Councillors and the people's representatives from the 20 Dzongkhags for the trust and confidence they reposed in him by electing him as the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. He also offered his Tashi Delek to the new cabinet ministers who had been nominated and elected as a result of the trust and confidence reposed in them by His Majesty the King and the people. Invoking the presence of the Divine Deities, and with total belief in the principle of Ley-Jumdrey (cause and effect), he offered his pledge before the Golden Throne and the august presence of the Assembly to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of his knowledge and ability with total loyalty and dedication.

Since India is Bhutan's closest neighbour and trading partner, the business community have to travel frequently to India. On such trips through Assam, he said, many of our people have been frequently robbed and harassed by the Bodo and ULFA militants. The difficulties and risks faced by our business community and people travelling through Assam will become even more serious as a result of the Bodo-ULFA problem.

He reminded the Assembly that it was His Majesty the King who dealt with the gravest problems facing the country in the past and that the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan could not harm the country because His Majesty had taken the full responsibility of resolving it. Likewise, it is imperative that the people pledge their full support, faith and confidence in His Majesty's decisions regarding the Bodo-ULFA problem. If the problem is not resolved, the Bhutanese people will lose the benefits of the country's rapid socio-economic development.

The BCCI president proposed that, as the Bodo and ULFA militants are Indian citizens, discussions should be held with the Indian government to find an early solution to the problem. With Assam having a population of 26 million and Bhutan's population being

only 600,000, there is no question of a military solution to the problem. As the hon'ble members have already pointed out, the relations between India and Bhutan are very close like milk and water. Therefore, the two governments should resolve the problem through dialogue under the guidance of His Majesty the King.

He submitted that the business community had pledged their total support to the government during the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan including money, material and even their lives if necessary. He pointed out that whatever assets and money the business community possessed were not brought from outside but generated within the country through the support and opportunity provided by the government. The business community would, therefore, like to re-affirm their pledge of total support to the government and the country.

The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Goongloen Gongma Lam Dorji expressed his appreciation to the hon'ble members for raising several issues of vital concern to the country. He would, however, confine his comments to only those that concerned national security. He said that the Bodo and ULFA militants, who had established camps inside Bhutan, are well armed and pose a serious security risk to the country. Their continued presence could also affect the close friendship between India and Bhutan because they are committing terrorist and criminal acts in India and escaping to the camps they have established in Bhutan.

The Goongloen Gongma pointed out that although Bhutan has always enjoyed close and friendly relations with the people of Assam, the Bodo-ULFA militants have infiltrated into our country, carrying sophisticated arms. As the hon'ble members have already submitted, the continued presence of these heavily armed militants poses a serious threat to the sovereignty and security of our country.

Given the gravity of this situation, the Goongloen Gongma expressed his concern that some Bhutanese citizens were carrying and transporting supplies and food rations for the militants, as mentioned by some of the Assembly members. In view of the serious threat posed by the militants, any citizen providing any form of assistance to them are undermining the security of the country and should, therefore, be dealt with according to the 1992 National Security Act.

The Goongloen Gongma said that His Majesty the King is fully aware of the security threat posed by the Bodo and ULFA militants. He assured the Assembly that the security forces will discharge their responsibilities in protecting the security of the country with unwavering loyalty and dedication and in full accordance with the commands of His Majesty the King. He also expressed his deep appreciation to the people for their concern and support, and their confidence in the security forces.

The Home Minister appreciated the deep concerns expressed by the hon'ble members over the grave threat posed to the security and sovereignty of the country by the presence of the ULFA and Bodo militants on Bhutanese soil. The hon'ble members are in fact echoing the voices of thousands of Bhutanese people across the nation who have already made similar submissions to His Majesty the King during the Eighth Plan meetings in the different Dzongkhags over the past one year. The minister deeply appreciated the concerns of the public and their pledge to serve His Majesty the King and the Royal Government, and their readiness to even sacrifice their lives, if necessary, in resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem. After all, if we are not concerned about the security of our own country nobody else will be, he said.

The Home Minister said that the presence of ULFA and Bodo militants within our territory poses the greatest threat to Bhutan's security and sovereignty, perhaps in its entire history. The ULFA (United Liberation Front of Assam) are militants fighting for the independence of Assam from India while the Bodos are fighting for the creation of a separate Bodoland state for themselves. The two militant groups are, therefore, fighting against the Government of India. Since Bhutan is a very small country, there is every possibility that our country will be affected, as the saying goes, "when elephants clash, ants get trampled under their feet."

The ULFA and Bodo militants are well trained and armed with very sophisticated modern weapons. They also seem to have plenty of resources and manpower. Just as they have intruded into Bhutan without any regard for its territorial integrity, they are just as unlikely to leave from here willingly and peacefully. On the other hand, any attempt to evict them forcefully would be very costly.

Besides, it is necessary to also keep in mind the security threat from the ngolops who have been committing heinous crimes from their camps in Nepal and then trying to falsely malign the Royal Government for the past many years. There is every possibility that

these ngolops who have been making every effort to undermine the security and sovereignty of the kingdom will seize the opportunity and join hands with the ULFA and Bodo militants to harm our country.

For centuries, India and Bhutan have maintained excellent relations. The presence of ULFA and Bodo militants in Bhutan could become a major irritant in Indo-Bhutan relations. At the same time, the ULFA and Bodo militants are Assamese people with whom the Bhutanese people have for centuries shared a common border and maintained very close relations. Any military exchange between the Royal Government and the ULFA and Bodo militants may result in retaliations by the 25 million people in Assam to the many Bhutanese citizens and vehicles that have to travel on a daily basis through Assam. These are indeed major dilemmas for any country, let alone a small landlocked country like Bhutan, said the Home Minister.

However, through the blessings of the Guardian Deities and the wisdom and foresight of our beloved King, we have always managed to solve many big and complex problems. Therefore, what is most important at this stage is for all of us to have faith in the blessings of our Guardian Deities and put our complete trust in the wise and dedicated leadership of His Majesty the King. It may be recalled that last year's 75th Session of the National Assembly had entrusted the responsibility of finding a lasting solution to the Bodo-ULFA problem to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government. To this end, while it is of utmost importance that Bhutanese people of all walks of life should continue to be deeply concerned and always ready to protect their country even at the cost of their own lives, if necessary, they should have total trust and confidence in the actions being taken by His Majesty the King and the Royal Government.

A Royal Advisory Councillor pointed out that the militants had entered Bhutan without permission and gave the Indian government reason to feel concerned. As some of the important roads into Bhutan goes through the state of Assam it is not prudent to engage in conflicts with the militants who are well armed and trained. The only option is to have complete trust in His Majesty the King to resolve the problem.

The Chukha Dzongda pointed out that if the public fully understood the gravity of the problem no one would help the militants in any way. Furthermore, as it is India's internal problem, Bhutan should urge India to find a political solution to overcome this problem.

The Minister for Health and Education expressed his appreciation for the spontaneous response of the hon'ble members on the Bodo-ULFA issue. Their willingness to sacrifice property, money, if need be their own lives, and also the expression of faith and confidence in His Majesty the King touched him very deeply. He said that it reflected the same indomitable spirit which enabled our forefathers to successfully repel invasions from the north as well as the south at a difficult period in the history of our country.

The minister said that there can be no better security than the strength in unity, integrity, loyalty and the conviction of the Bhutanese people to think and act as one. The age old tradition of loyalty and harmony between the leadership and the people gave him the confidence to recommend that resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem should best be left to the wisdom and ingenuity of His Majesty the King and the Royal Government.

The Goongloen Gongma pointed out that although the problem posed by the Bodo-ULFA militants had been deliberated extensively, the Assembly had not arrived at a clear cut solution. He said that in his 41 years of service in the RBA, he could not recall a more serious threat to the country's security. Even the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962, although it caused great concern and difficulties to us, did not harm our country which has remained peaceful since then, he said.

The Goongloen Gongma pointed out that the serious security threat posed by the heavily armed Bodo and ULFA militants who had infiltrated into Bhutan could become even more grave if the ngolops joined hands with them. While it is not within the purview of the security forces to spell out the solution to the problem, he said, it is our sacred duty to safeguard the security and sovereignty of the country. The Goongloen Gongma assured the Assembly that the security forces will serve and act in full conformity with the command and direction of His Majesty the King to fulfill this responsibility.

The Finance Minister said that, given the serious situation, the thorough discussion in the Assembly about the implication of the Bodo-ULFA problem is necessary and worthwhile. He said the implementation of the Seventh Plan was seriously threatened by the ngolop problem. Fortunately, the strong leadership provided by His Majesty the King and the loyalty and support of the people enabled Bhutan to successfully implement the Seventh Plan for the benefit of all citizens.

The Bodo-ULFA problem poses a serious threat to the implementation of the Eighth Plan for which, it has already been reported that the Royal Government has kept a budget of

Nu.30,000.00 million excluding Nu.18,000.00 million earmarked for special mega projects. He said that peace and stability are vital for the successful implementation of the Plan programmes. He reminded the Assembly that 12 out of the 20 Dzongkhags will be affected if the Bodo-ULFA problem is not resolved. Even service facilities established during earlier Plan periods would be disrupted. Given the complexity of the problem, the Finance Minister requested the Assembly to entrust full responsibility to the Royal Government and His Majesty the King. The minister said that in order to resolve the Bodo-ULFA problem, the National Assembly members have given several suggestions and the government itself is looking for a solution. He, however, pointed out that given the explosive nature of the problem it would be best to seek a peaceful solution. Any other approach could create difficulties for the parties concerned.

Addressing the Assembly, His Majesty the King said that Bhutan has never faced a more serious threat to its security in the past one hundred years of its history. The problem is of a major dimension because the Bodo and ULFA militants, who have infiltrated into Bhutan, are well armed, wear military uniforms, and have considerable resources. Their camps are inside Bhutan while their people live in the bordering state of Assam which has a population of 25 million. Although they are armed militants, if any of them are killed in Bhutan, the Bhutanese security forces will be blamed for killing Indian citizens, and all Bhutanese will face the repercussions in Assam. The trade and communications links through Assam could be closed, the Eighth Five-Year development programmes will be severely disrupted and the people of the 12 Dzongkhags of Dagana, Tsirang, Sarpang, Zhemgang, Trongsa, Bumthang, Samdrupjongkhar, Pemagatshel, Trashigang, Trashiyangtse, Mongar and Lhuentse, comprising a total of 120 geogs, will suffer the consequences.

A far more serious concern is that the problem will not only disrupt development and trade, but it will threaten the security and sovereignty of the country. Therefore, it will be very useful if, instead of merely recounting the difficulties and the threat involved, the hon'ble members could also suggest possible solutions to the problem.

Although removing the Bodo-ULFA problem will not be an easy task, His Majesty assured the National Assembly that he will personally bear the full responsibility of safeguarding the security of the nation and ensuring the long term well-being of the country and the people. His Majesty said that the well-being of Bhutan and the Bhutanese people is far more important than His own life. If the newly elected cabinet ministers also

put the interest of the country and the people before their own and faithfully discharge their duties and responsibilities, His Majesty will be able to concentrate fully on resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem. In fact, it was in the interest of the nation's security and sovereignty, and the well-being of the people, that the recent changes in the executive governance of the country had been introduced.

It is imperative for the present and future interest of the country that this problem which threatens Bhutan's security and the successful implementation of the Eighth Plan is peacefully resolved. His Majesty, therefore, pledged to take on the full responsibility of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem and ensuring the security and sovereignty of the Bhutanese nation.

The Thimphu Chimi submitted that the sunshine of peace and happiness has been shining on Bhutan because of His Majesty the King. He offered the deep gratitude of the people to His Majesty for taking on the full responsibility of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem and expressed his hope that the newly elected cabinet ministers will share in the responsibilities of solving the problem and help to fulfill His Majesty's aspirations for ensuring the peace, happiness and well-being of the Bhutanese nation and people. For their part, the people pledged their total support and unwavering loyalty and commitment in safeguarding the security and sovereignty of the country even at the cost of their lives.

Bhutan has always been able to defend itself from external aggression not because of military or economic might but because of the blessings of the Guardian Deities of the Palden Drukpa, the dynamic leadership of its leaders and the good fortune of the people. The people have always believed that the wisdom of a King is equal to that of a hundred ministers and we will always support all decisions taken by His Majesty the King, he said.

The Chimi pointed out that the people owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to His Majesty the King who has ensured peace and happiness for his subjects while taking on the responsibilities of solving all problems and difficulties facing the country. For this reason, we must all respect and honour His Majesty's commands and fulfill them with unswerving loyalty like a dutiful child follows the path shown by his loving father.

He said that His Majesty's assumption of the responsibility to find a lasting solution to the Bodo-ULFA problem makes rain seem like sacred water and the puddle on the ground like a pool of rich offerings. Even the rainbows in the sky are a reflection of His

Majesty's radiance. He expressed his hope and prayer that the Bodo-ULFA problem will be peacefully resolved through His Majesty's wisdom, and the threat from these militants who have illegally entered Bhutan will fade away like clouds dissipated by the rays of the sun,

Giving his views on the issue, the Foreign Minister said that the Bodo-ULFA problem is a problem of unprecedented gravity and complexity. Given this, it is only natural that our people are deeply concerned and wish for a speedy resolution of the problem.

Firstly, besides affecting the free movement of goods and people, the problem threatens to disrupt the smooth implementation of the Eighth Five-Year Plan. Secondly, the armed militants are carrying out terrorist activities against our people and thereby posing a serious threat not only to our internal security but also to our national sovereignty. Thirdly, our excellent relations with India could also be adversely affected.

The Foreign Minister remarked that according to the hon'ble members, there are two aspects to the problem. Firstly, it is a domestic problem between the Government of India and its citizens. Just as India fully respects our sovereignty, we must acknowledge the fact that the problem of insurgency is an internal problem of India. Furthermore, recognizing the capacity and the political will of India to resolve the problem, we do not see any reason to offer any advice. It is our hope that the Government of India will find a speedy and durable solution to the problem. Secondly, until such a solution is found, Bhutan will continue to face the spill-over effects of India's internal problem. It is in relation to this internal problem of India spilling over into Bhutan, with all its attendant threats to our national sovereignty, that we must try to find a mutually satisfactory solution through dialogue with the Government of India. In this regard, the Indian government is fully appreciative of how much we value the close friendship between our two countries. Likewise, it is also aware that Bhutan has neither invited the Bodo-ULFA militants nor is it a willing host to them.

The Foreign Minister said that, as the hon'ble members are aware, His Majesty the King and the Royal Government are fully cognizant and concerned about the problem and its immediate and strategic implications. Given the military nature of the problem, there are constraints to public discussion of the details of the initiatives being taken by the Royal Government to resolve the problem. What is important is to put our trust in the abiding

love of His Majesty for His people and His loyalty and devotion to their well-being, and the actions being taken by the Royal Government.

During the two days in which the National Assembly has considered this issue, the concerns of the members have been submitted to His Majesty the King and noted by the Council of Ministers. The people should rest assured that His Majesty the King and the Royal Government will find and implement the ideal solution keeping in mind the long-term interest of the nation. The Foreign Minister pledged his full dedication to addressing this problem. Furthermore, he also expressed his confidence in his ability to further strengthen the excellent relations between Bhutan and India.

Similarly, the Chimis of Haa and Punakha Dzongkhags pointed out that because His Majesty the King took on the full responsibility for the ngolop problem in 1990, the people have been able to enjoy continued peace and prosperity. Again, His Majesty has taken on the full responsibility of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem. The people feel ashamed that every time there is a problem, the responsibility of solving it is entrusted to His Majesty the King. He pointed out that His Majesty had also reposed his full faith in the new cabinet, and the people hope that the cabinet ministers and the Royal Advisory Councillors will fulfill the high expectations, and come up with strategies and ideas to strengthen the peace and harmony enjoyed by Bhutan today.

A Royal Advisory Councillor and the Tsirang Chimi said that some of the people in the Dzongkhags affected by the Bodo-ULFA problem were not following the 1992 National Security Act. It is, therefore, necessary to make the people familiar with the provisions of this Act. They also submitted that finding a lasting solution to the Bodo-ULFA problem is the responsibility of the two governments of Bhutan and India. The illegal entry of the militants into Bhutanese territory is like a son who builds a house on another person's land. Just as the responsibility of settling such a problem would fall on the parents, it is the responsibility of the Indian Government to take back the militants who are Indian citizens without affecting the security and sovereignty of Bhutan.

Concluding the deliberations, the Speaker said that, because it is a very serious issue, the Bodo-ULFA problem has been deliberated at great length by the Assembly. The hon'ble members have expressed their deep concern that this problem, which could affect the close and friendly relations between India and Bhutan, poses a very serious threat to the security and sovereignty of the country. It is, therefore, a matter of pride and satisfaction

for the National Assembly to note that the people of all the 20 Dzongkhags, through their elected representatives, have expressed their readiness to sacrifice everything they own, including their lives if necessary, in support of whatever decision is taken by His Majesty the King and the Royal Government to resolve this problem.

The National Assembly noted that, as pointed out by His Majesty the King, the Bodo-ULFA problem is the most serious security threat the country has faced in the past hundred years, and resolving it is of paramount importance. Just as in the case of the ngolop problem in 1990 which His Majesty had taken the full responsibility to resolve because the Assembly members could not come up with any solution, His Majesty had now taken upon himself the full responsibility of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem. The National Assembly recorded a vote of thanks to His Majesty the King and resolved that all the members were deeply honoured to repose the full responsibility of resolving the Bodo-ULFA problem in His Majesty the King and the Royal Government. The National Assembly also placed on record the complete faith and confidence of the people and their pledge of total loyalty and support, expressed through their elected representatives, to His Majesty the King.

XIX. MILITIA TRAINING

The Tshangkha Chimi submitted that the people of Tshangkha Geog in Dagana Dzongkhag are greatly concerned about the security of the country because of the threat from the anti-national elements as well as the presence of ULFA militants from India on Bhutanese soil. To ensure security at the geog and Dzongkhag level, the people of Dagana and, in particular, the public of Tshangkha Geog, wish to volunteer for militia training to safeguard the security of our country, he said.

In response, the Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army (RBA), Goongloen Gongma Lam Dorji, said that the army is happy to know that all the able-bodied people from Dagana are ready to undergo militia training.

Since 1990, when the country encountered numerous problems due to the ngolop problem, the security forces comprising the RBA, Royal Body Guards (RBG) and Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) have been able to serve the country successfully with courage and dedication because of the blessings of the Guardian Deities, the wise leadership of His Majesty the King, and the full support from the people.

The Goongloen Gongma informed the Assembly that after the ngolop problem had risen the people of Bhutan had, through the National Assembly, repeatedly pledged their full physical and material support and also volunteered for militia training. Out of 9,895 volunteers who were trained subsequently, 4,864 had even served in the troubled parts of the country together with the regular army, with complete loyalty and dedication. As there is a continuous flow of people who want to join the army, there is no need to specifically recruit volunteers for militia training, he said.

Since 1996, His Majesty the King had increased the salary and other benefits of the army, attracting many volunteers to join the armed forces. With the Army Training Centre in Tenchholing having reached full capacity, some of the recruits are being trained at the RBG camp in Dechencholing. One batch has already passed out from Dechencholing and a second batch is currently undergoing training.

If, because of the Bodo-ULFA problem, there is a serious threat to the security of the country, the armed forces have full confidence that they can always count on the support of the people. The Goongloen Gongma, therefore, deeply appreciated the readiness of the people to come forward and volunteer for militia service.

The Speaker said that it is a source of deep pride and satisfaction to see the extent to which the people are ready to come forward and volunteer for militia service to safeguard the security of the country against the threat from the ngolop problem earlier and from the problem of the Bodo and ULFA militants today.

As there are many volunteers coming forward to join the armed forces today and they are being trained at the Army Training Centre in Tenchholing and the RBG camp in Dechencholing, for the time being this should be adequate. He suggested that the question of training militia volunteers should be dealt with as and when the need may arise for the security of the country.

The National Assembly decided that the question of training militia volunteers should be dealt with as and when the need may arise for the security of the country.

**XX.REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT OF INDIA TO BE
APPRISED OF THE RECENT INCIDENT IN
NICHULA**

The Kalikhola Chimi submitted that the people of Nichula Geog in Kalikhola Dungkhag would like to report that on 19th May 1998, about 165 armed Indian soldiers from across the border entered Allay and Katarey villages in Nichula Geog and terrorised the people. All houses in the villages were raided and their belongings, including official documents of the Gup, were thrown all over the place. A total of Nu. 65,000 was looted from the houses and eight people were severely beaten up.

The sudden onslaught by a large number of soldiers on their villages, without any intimation to the local authorities, had taken everyone by surprise. The people of Nichula have still not recovered from the mental trauma caused by the incident. They feel that they have been unduly harassed and, therefore, request the government to kindly take up this issue with the Government of India, he said.

In support, the Sarpang Chimi said that a large number of armed soldiers had forcefully entered the villages of Alley and Katarey in Nichula Geog. Leave alone obtaining permission from the Royal Government, they did not even intimate the local authorities of Kalikhola Dungkhag or Sarpang Dzongkhag. He confirmed that the Indian soldiers attacked and beat up the villagers, and robbed them of cash and personal belongings. Since it is possible that the Government of India was not aware that Indian Army soldiers had inflicted such harm and terror on Bhutanese citizens, he requested the government to take up the matter with the Government of India.

The Chimis of Punakha, Trongsa, Bumthang and Thimphu Dzongkhags and the Royal Advisory Councillors, all said that the close and excellent friendship between the India and Bhutan has come to be regarded by the world as a model of good neighbourly relations. However, going by this totally unexpected intrusion into Nichula by a company of Indian Army soldiers who raided and beat up Bhutanese citizens, the Royal Government should raise the issue with the Government of India and apprise them fully of the incident. They explained that if the two governments did not discuss the incident together, misunderstandings could arise and harm the close and excellent relations between the two countries. They requested for the matter to be raised with the Indian government to ensure that such incidents do not occur in the future and also to clear up any misunderstandings.

Other Chimis pointed out that if some Bhutanese were to commit a similar crime on Indian soil, the Indian government would automatically raise the matter with the Royal Government. Some Chimis expressed their doubts that since the intruders who attacked the people of Nichula were not ignorant rural folks but soldiers of the Indian Army, the raid may have been deliberately carried out on the instructions of their superiors. Others wondered whether the Bodo-ULFA militants, dressed as Indian soldiers, might not have been the culprits.

The Chief Operations Officer of the Royal Bhutan Army, Goongloen Gongma Lam Dorji noted that the hon'ble members were obviously very disturbed by the incident and had expressed grave doubts and reservations about the close relations between India and Bhutan. He assured the National Assembly that the government had not overlooked the incident. In fact, on the command of His Majesty the King, he had promptly given the details of the incident, in writing, to the Government of India. The Indian government is investigating the case and has said that they will respond once the investigations are completed. The Goongloen Gongma assured the Assembly that he will submit the report to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government on receiving the response of the Government of India.

The National Assembly decided that the matter should be dealt with by His Majesty the King and the Royal Government after receiving the response from the Government of India.

XXI. EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

The Chimis of Trashigang and Lhuentse Dzongkhags expressed the deep gratitude of the people to His Majesty the King for the visits made by the royal entourage to their Dzongkhags. His Majesty the King, Their Majesties the Queens, Their Royal Highnesses the Princes and Princesses, accompanied by senior government officials, had graced the 90th National Day celebrations in Trashigang and visited the remote geogs in the Dzongkhag as a part of the launching of the Eighth Five-Year Plan. The royal visits to the remote geogs had provided an unique opportunity to the people to receive a personal audience with His Majesty the King and the members of the royal family in their own villages.

They also expressed their deep gratitude and appreciation for the successful implementation and conclusion of the result-oriented Seventh Five-Year Plan as well as for the allocation of a huge budget for the Eighth Five-Year Plan. The public, therefore, pledged their full loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the King, and prayed for the long life and glorious reign of His Majesty.

The Gasa Chimi submitted that His Majesty the King inaugurated Gasa as a new Dzongkhag with the commencement of the Seventh Five-Year Plan in order to bring development to the people of this remote Dzongkhag and improve their quality of life. For the first time, Gasa was allotted with its own development programmes and budget, and the achievements of the Seventh Plan in Gasa had been very commendable. Earlier this year, His Majesty the King and the royal family, accompanied by senior government officials, travelled on foot for two days to discuss the Eighth Five-Year Plan programmes with the people. Many Kidus were granted to the people and the increase in the funds allocated for development programmes during the Eighth Plan, to further enhance the welfare of the people, was beyond all expectations. The people of Gasa Dzongkhag, therefore, express their deep gratitude to His Majesty the King and pledge to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with utmost loyalty and dedication, he said.

The public of Pemagatshel Dzongkhag expressed their deepest gratitude and appreciation to His Majesty the King, the royal family and senior government officials, for the royal visit to finalize the Eighth Five-Year Plan with the people of their Dzongkhag. The people are deeply honoured that, in spite of being a small and relatively remote Dzongkhag, His Majesty and the Royal Government have been gracious in treating it at par with the larger Dzongkhags. Further, the people are deeply grateful to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for finalizing the Eighth Five-Year Plan with a very large budget outlay.

The public of Tangsibji and Nubi geogs under Trongsa Dzongkhag expressed their deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for allocating a very large budget for development programmes in their Dzongkhag during the Eighth Five-Year Plan. In particular, the people are deeply grateful that major renovations will be undertaken on the Trongsa Dzong, a Rigshung school will be established at Dorzhong Goempa and a feasibility study will be carried out for a hydel project on the Mangdechhu.

The public of Tsirang Dzongkhag expressed their happiness and sincere gratitude to His Majesty the King for always attaching special interest and importance to the development programmes in southern Bhutan. The launching of all the Five-Year Plans have always started from the southern Dzongkhags just as the Eighth Five-Year Plan meetings were started in Tsirang Dzongkhag. The public of Tsirang Dzongkhag were very fortunate to have His Majesty begin the Eighth Five-Year Plan meetings from Tsirang and to have so many developmental programmes finalized for their Dzongkhag.

The re-opening and upgrading of the Damphu Junior School to a high school and the Lamidara Community School in addition to all the existing schools has been a great boon to the general public. The people of Tsirang were very proud to see His Majesty's happiness during His visit to their Dzongkhag and have been greatly honoured by the presence of His Majesty the King, Their Majesties the Queens and Their Royal Highnesses the Princes and Princesses. They offered their deep gratitude for the royal visit.

The public of Zhemgang Dzongkhag submitted that during the Eighth Plan meeting on 21st April 1998 held at Zhemgang, His Majesty the King, taking into consideration the Kidu of the people of Kheng, had very kindly approved the construction of two new motor roads in Zhemgang, namely, Dakphel-Buli (37 kms) and Praling-Gomphu (8kms). Moreover, the overall budget allocated for development activities under the Eighth Plan was far more than what was provided in the Seventh Five-Year Plan. The people of Khengrig Namsum expressed their deepest gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for the approval of these roads and the large budget allocated for the implementation of development programmes in their Dzongkhag during the Eighth Plan.

The public of Chhukha Dzongkhag expressed their heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King, Their Majesties the Queens, Their Royal Highnesses the Princes and Princesses, and senior government officials for coming to their Dzongkhag for the Eighth Five-Year Plan meeting. They were greatly heartened to note that the concerned Ministries and Divisions, and the Planning Ministry had included all their requests for various service facilities and the development programmes they had proposed through their Block Development Committees and the District Development Committees. This clearly shows the importance the government attaches to the decentralization of the decision making process. It is also a clear evidence of the concern that His Majesty the King and the government have for improving the living standards of the people, especially in the rural

areas. The people of Chhukha, therefore, reiterate their pledge of unwavering loyalty to the Tsa-Wa-Sum.

The public of Samtse Dzongkhag expressed their gratitude to His Majesty the King for blessing them with the royal visit to Samtse to discuss and finalize their Dzongkhag's Eighth Five-Year Plan programmes. This historic meeting held on 10th April with over 4,000 representatives from all 16 geogs will always be remembered as a golden step nearer for the achievement of Gross National Happiness as always envisaged by His Majesty the King.

With just over a year left to enter the 21st Century, the people of Samtse could not have a better Soilra from His Majesty the King than in the approval of the Samtse-Phuntsholing road and granting of land to the landless people. The road, once completed, will ensure greater security and prosperity for Samtse

Dzongkhag. For their part, the people volunteer to contribute labour for the early completion of the road. The people of Samtse wish to pledge their continued loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the King, and express their prayers for His long life and glorious reign.

The public of Drujegang Geog in Dagana Dzongkhag submitted that despite Dagana Dzongkhag being one of the disturbed Dzongkhags, the Royal Government has continued to accord very high priority for various development activities and has allocated substantial budgets in all the Plans. Accordingly, they were able to execute all the developmental activities successfully in their Dzongkhag. These priorities continued to be accorded in the current Eighth Five-Year Plan as well.

The public of Drujegang expressed their profound appreciation and gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for ensuring the successful completion of all the planned activities under Dagana Dzongkhag. The people of Dagana have complete faith and confidence that under the far-sighted leadership of His Majesty the King, they will continue to enjoy peace and prosperity and that all the planned activities of the Eighth Five-Year Plan will also be achieved successfully.

The public of Mongar Geog reiterated their deep gratitude to His Majesty the King for approving the bifurcation of five large geogs in their Dzongkhag into new geogs for the welfare of the people. They also reiterated their pledge of full loyalty and dedication to His Majesty the King.

Joining the expressions of appreciation to His Majesty the King, the Chimis of Wangdue Phodrang, Haa, Paro, Trashigang, Bumthang and Thimphu Dzongkhags submitted that Bhutan has been enjoying continued peace and prosperity despite the outbreak of the ngolop problem in southern Bhutan in 1990 because His Majesty, without any thought for His own personal safety, took upon himself the full responsibility of resolving the problem. It is because of His Majesty's wise leadership and total commitment to safeguarding and promoting the interests of the country, that the ngolop problem could neither affect the implementation of Plan programmes and the process of socio-economic development in the country nor disturb its peace and security. Further, His Majesty the King and the royal family, accompanied by senior government officials, visited all the 20 Dzongkhags this year to discuss and finalize the Eighth Five-Year Plan programmes with the people. Huge budgets, almost twice the Seventh Plan outlays, have been allocated to all the Dzongkhags for the Eighth Plan. Work is underway on four mega projects - the Tala, Basochu and Kurichu power projects and the Dungsam Cement Project - which will give a major boost to Bhutan's economic development. The people, therefore, wish to express their heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King and the Royal Government for all these benefits.

Similarly, the Chimis of Samdrupjongkhar and Punakha Dzongkhags submitted that His Majesty the King is indeed the wish fulfilling gem that provides everything the Bhutanese people desire, a King who upholds the Dharma and rules his subjects with love and care, and the dedicated leader to whom the people of Bhutan owe everything. His Majesty works day and night for the welfare of the people and the country without any regard for his own comfort or security. The people, therefore, express their heartfelt gratitude to His Majesty the King for his wise and selfless leadership. The debt of gratitude owed by the people is so great that if it could take physical form it would fill up the whole universe.

Further, the Chimis expressed their gratitude to the pillar of religion in Bhutan, His Holiness the Je Khenpo, the Monk Body and the religious community for continuously performing Kurims for the peace of the world and, in particular, for the long life and glorious reign of His Majesty the King and everlasting peace and security for the country of the Palden Drukpa.

The Chimis summed up the sentiments of the people with a prayer, "May the reign of His Majesty the King be long and glorious and may the cherished institution of hereditary

monarchy continue to provide the guiding light to the Bhutanese people for as long as the waters of the rivers flow. May the land of the Palden Drukpa, with its just and transparent laws, and with the King, government and people thinking and acting in unity and harmony, never even hear about misfortunes like disease, famine and conflicts. May the people of the unique Kingdom of the Palden Drukpa, under the wise guidance and protective umbrella of His Majesty the King and the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, continue to enjoy peace, prosperity and happiness for all time to come.”

The Speaker noted that the deep gratitude and appreciation expressed by the people of the 202 geogs of the 20 Dzongkhags for the benefits derived from the successful implementation of development programmes, and the approval of even larger budgets and more extensive development programmes during the Eighth Five-Year Plan, is a matter of deep satisfaction for the National Assembly. He concluded the deliberations with his prayer that with the government and the people working hand in hand, with one thought and mind, under the wise leadership of His Majesty the King, all the national policies and objectives will be successfully achieved, thereby ensuring that the people of the unique Kingdom of the Palden Drukpa will enjoy peace, prosperity and happiness for all time to come.

XXII. CONCLUDING CEREMONY

On behalf of the six Royal Advisory Councillors who will be completing their three year term at the end of October 1998, Dasho Yeshe Dorji expressed their heart-felt gratitude to His Majesty the King and the National Assembly for reposing full trust and confidence in them to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum as the people’s representatives in the Royal Advisory Council. For the past three years, they had the honour and opportunity of working closely with His Majesty the King and they will forever cherish the wise guidance and understanding they received from His Majesty.

He also requested the understanding and forgiveness of the hon’ble members if, during their tenure, there had been any shortcomings on their part in discharging their responsibilities as the bridge between the people and the government.

He expressed the satisfaction and appreciation of the outgoing Councillors that their successors who had been elected by the Assembly are all capable and experienced, and very knowledgeable about the policies of the government and the role they have to play as the bridge between the government and the people. He expressed their hope and

confidence that the Councillors-elect will serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of their abilities and with total loyalty and dedication.

He concluded with a prayer to the Triple Gem for the long life and glorious reign of His Majesty the King and for the precious institution of hereditary monarchy to flourish for as long as the water of the rivers flow. “May His Majesty’s fame reach every corner of the world and the bond of love and loyalty between the King and the people remain forever strong. May the people’s wishes for good fortune, peace and happiness be fulfilled and all obstacles to the Tsa-Wa-Sum be overcome, and may the sunshine of good fortune never set in the Kingdom of the Palden Drukpa.”

The Chimi of Thimphu, Chang Dorji submitted that after deep contemplation, and in keeping with the changing times, His Majesty the King had issued a Kasho to the Speaker during the 76th Session of the National Assembly. The points in the Kasho had been thoroughly deliberated and the Royal Kasho fully endorsed for which he expressed his deep appreciation.

He also expressed his appreciation to all the former cabinet ministers and the six outgoing Royal Advisory Councillors for having served the Tsa-Wa-Sum to the best of their abilities, keeping in mind the well-being of the country and the people.

Lastly, he expressed his hope and prayers that the six new cabinet ministers, the Deputy Speaker and the six Councillors-elect will discharge their important responsibilities in promoting the well-being and interests of the Palden Drukpa, thereby fulfilling the aspirations of His Majesty the King and the people of Bhutan.

The Tshenye Lopen of the Central Monastic Body reminded the members that the Bhutanese people have had the good fortune of being ruled by eminent luminaries who based the system of governance on the values of the Dharma, and that with the establishment of the cherished system of hereditary monarchy, Bhutan has been enjoying an enlightened and stable system of government under which unprecedented progress and development has been taking place like the waxing of the moon. In particular, he expressed his deep gratitude to His Majesty the King who has worked day and night with single-minded dedication to safeguard and promote the interest of the country. The fruits of His Majesty’s selfless dedication and hard work are being enjoyed in equal measure by all the people of Bhutan including the Clergy.

He thanked all the former cabinet ministers who had assisted His Majesty the King in the governance of the country. He also expressed his hope and prayers that the new cabinet ministers will be able to fulfill the noble aspirations of His Majesty the King in introducing the profound changes in the system of governance to ensure even greater peace and happiness for the people of Bhutan.

Finally, on behalf of the Clergy, he offered his prayers for the continued unity and harmony of religious and secular values in the governance of the country, and that the strong bond of loyalty and trust between the Clergy, the cherished institution of hereditary monarchy and the people will grow ever stronger. “May the Bhutanese people never hear of misfortunes like disease, famine and conflicts, and may peace and happiness flourish and prevail forever in the Kingdom of the Palden Drukpa.”

Addressing the National Assembly before the concluding ceremony, the Speaker expressed satisfaction that the 76th Session of the National Assembly had successfully deliberated and dealt with a number of national issues of both present and future importance and significance. The success of the 76th Session was possible because of the blessings of the Triple Gem, the perfect and peerless leadership and guidance of His Majesty the King and the active participation of all the members.

The religious and the secular have paired up harmoniously in our country, the land of medicinal plants, said the Speaker. Both economic development and the precious teachings of Lord Buddha’s Dharma are flourishing and growing like the waxing of the moon. This state of peace and happiness is the fruit of His Majesty the King’s diligence and commitment to the nation and the people.

Since His ascension to the Golden Throne, His Majesty the King has worked tirelessly and without regard for his own personal comfort and safety. With wisdom and foresight, His Majesty formulated sound national policies which have resulted in economic development beyond all expectations and also greatly strengthened the security of the country.

The 76th Session of the National Assembly will go down in the annals of Bhutanese history as one of the most unforgettable and important events for it was during this session that the unexpected Royal Decree, a Kasho seemingly from the God of Wisdom himself, was delivered from the Golden Throne to the memidence in His Majesty the

Druk Gyalpo. The Royal Kasho was not only an unexpected shock but was also a source of overwhelming concern to the members of the National Assembly.

The Speaker said that Bhutan's most precious jewel, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, is a truly selfless King who is willing to sacrifice even His own life for the welfare of His people. Because His Majesty loves and cares for the people even more than for His own children, the Assembly members had no choice but to accept and fulfill the royal directives in the Kasho.

The devolution of extensive powers to the National Assembly and full executive powers to the Council of Ministers is yet another sign of His Majesty's unreserved faith and trust in the people. The Speaker said that it is important for the hon'ble members to remember that the destiny of Bhutan lies in the hands of the Bhutanese people, as His Majesty has always emphasized to us.

The Speaker pointed out that, as all the hon'ble members are aware, during the deliberations of the 76th Session, His Majesty the King has constantly stressed the importance and the need to place the national interest above individual interests. Our King is unique in this world, he said, in that the devolution of power to the people has always been initiated by His Majesty himself.

Because of his utter selflessness and noble deeds, His Majesty the King is a veritable Bodhisattava. To such a King, the government officials and the Clergy should express their gratitude through their deep respect and total loyalty. The Speaker called upon the government officials, the Clergy and the people to shoulder the responsibility which His Majesty has handed over to them with total loyalty and dedication.

The Speaker also pointed out that it is very important for the new cabinet ministers who have been elected by the National Assembly, in accordance to the Royal Kasho, to discharge their responsibilities with loyalty and commitment in the interest of the nation and the people.

The Speaker said that he highly appreciated the way in which the National Assembly has been able to take on new responsibilities and by the active participation and the depth of understanding shown by the members. He reminded the Chimis that they are the bridges between the government and the people, and their dedicated services are vital for ensuring the peace, prosperity and security of the country. They must work at implementing the

resolutions promptly and ensure that the general public is well-informed on the important issues that have been deliberated.

The Speaker urged the Clergy, the ministers and government officials, and the Chimis to serve the Tsa-Wa-Sum with unwavering loyalty and dedication.

The National Assembly pledged unanimous dedication and loyalty to the Tsa-Wa-Sum and concluded its 76th Session with the members offering the Tashi Moenlam prayer for the long life and glorious reign of His Majesty the King, the continued security and well-being of the country, the peace and prosperity of the Bhutanese people, and for the glorious Palden Drukpa to flourish for all time to come.

30th July, 1998

sd/-

(Lyonpo Kinzang Dorji)

Speaker

National Assembly of Bhutan

APPENDIX I

Review of the 1997 - 98 Budget

The Ministry of Finance has the honour to report to the honourable members of the National Assembly that the first year of the 8th Five Year Plan has come to a successful end. During the year, the GDP grew by 6% and inflation remained below 10%. There was no budgetary deficit and a revenue surplus as predicted last year was achieved. The balance of payments continued to record surpluses leading to a healthy growth of 26.7% in the external reserves. The additional cost of Nu. 185.0 m on account of the 20% increase in the salary of Government employees was more than covered by the 25% growth in domestic revenue.

In a move to further improve the financial sector, the Royal Government deregulated interest rates, liberalized foreign exchange availability and streamlined import procedures during the current fiscal year. These reform measures are expected to provide greater opportunities for private sector development and market oriented growth.

On the public expenditure front, spill-over activities from the 7th Plan continued to dominate. Summary of the approved and revised budget estimates for 1997-98 are given below:

Nu in Millions OUTLAY ORIGINAL REVISED

I	Current		
	Expenditure	2562.706	2709.305
II	Capital		
	Expenditure	3662.052	3351.139
SUB TOTAL		6224.758	6060.444
III	Net Lending	66,619	44.634
IV	Repayment	382.915	284.209
TOTAL		6674.292	6398.287

SOURCES OF FINANCE I. DOMESTIC REVENUE

i) Internal Revenue	2931.499	2860.286
ii) Other Receipts	-	22.683
SUB TOTAL	2931.499	2882.969

II GRANTS

i) GOI Program Grant	800.000	800.000
ii) GOI Project Grants	1128.147	770.841
iii) Grants from Other		
int. Agencies	1460.754	1591.634
SUB TOTAL	3388.901	3162.475

III. FINANCING

i) Borrowings from	External Sources	353.892
		344.443

SUB TOTAL	353.892	344.443
TOTAL	6674.292	6389.287

The budgetary allocation of Nu.6674.29 m approved for the fiscal year 1997-98 has been revised downwards to Nu.6389.29 m. The reduction in the overall outlay was caused mainly by delays in the implementation of certain projects under donor funding. On the current expenditure side, however, there has been an increase of 5.7% which is the result of inflation and minor unforeseen expenditures

One of the most important aspects of a government budget is the performance on the revenue front which is a vital indicator for sustainability and self-reliance. On this important front, the Royal Government achieved its objective of fully meeting the current expenditure from domestic revenue. The revised current expenditure for fiscal year 1997-98 is Nu. 2709.30 m, whereas the revenue is Nu. 2882.969m, thereby generating a current revenue surplus of Nu. 174.98 m. The sustained increase in revenue generation, consistently proven over several years, should ease the concerns of the donors over possible widening in the gap between revenue and current expenditure as a result of increased expenditure specially in the social sector.

The reduction in the plan outlay for the fiscal year 1997-98 should not be a cause for any concern as the pace of overall development has not been impeded. Most of the projects that could not be started have already been included for implementation during 1998-99. Moreover, the implementation of mega projects like the Kurichhu, Basochhu and the Tala hydro-electric projects are gaining momentum providing ample business and employment opportunities to the Bhutan people.

The most important event during the fiscal year was the visit of His Majesty the King to all the Dzongkhags for the final reaffirmation of the 8th Plan activities. In keeping with the tradition of dialogue initiated by His Majesty since the 5th Plan period, the people were given the opportunity to hear the policies and programs of the Government and to express their views directly to the King. The process of consultation and dialogue instituted through the forum of Dzongkhag Plan Meeting has strengthened and given true meaning to people's participation in decision making and the development of the Dzongkhags and the nation at large. The Dzongkhag Plans initiated by the Gewog Yargay Tsogchungs and refined by the Dzongkhags Yargay Tsogchungs were discussed openly

with the people and finalized taking into account the resource position and implementation capacity of the Government and the local communities.

In another landmark decision, His Majesty the King issued a Royal Command that Dzongkhag Plans henceforth be prepared on the basis of Gewogs. It was the desire of His Majesty the King to give greater responsibilities to the local communities to strengthen decentralization, enhance people's participation and promote self-reliance at the grassroots level. This decision is expected to enable local communities in Bhutan to assume more responsibilities for their own affairs compared to people in most countries in the development world.

Fiscal Year 1998-99

The Fiscal Year 1998-99, the second year of the 8th Plan, starts on the same note of optimism as during the first year. The economy is expected to continue to grow at 6% with the inflation remaining at about 8%. The balance of payments is projected to remain positive and the currency exchange rate is expected to continue to be stable. Moreover, the expenditures on the mega-projects would provide additional boost to private sector activities.

Most of the plan activities during the first year were spillover works carried on from the 7th Plan. Implementation of new 8th Plan projects will start mainly from this fiscal year onwards. A large number of the major works relate to construction of schools, hospitals, roads and power transmission. As in the past, government expenditure on the social sector will be about 30% of the entire outlay for the fiscal year. The heavy investments in these areas are expected to strengthen economic growth and widen the tax base further.

Summary of the 1998-99 Budget is presented below:

<u>A. EXPENDITURE</u>	<u>Nu. in millions</u>	<u>%</u>
I. Current Expenditure	2849.922	39.06
II. Capital Expenditure	4149.355	56.87
Sub Total :	6999.277	95.93
III. Net Lending	44.708	0.61
IV. Repayments	252.206	3.46

Total :	7296.191	100,00
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B. RECEIPTS

I. Internal Revenue	3094.081	42.41	II. External Grant
i) GOI program Gran	800.000	10.97	
ii) GOI Project Grant	1471.148	20.16	
iii) Other External			
Grants	1479.065	20.27	
Sub-total	3750.213	51.40	

C. FINANCING

I. External borrowings	451.897	6.19
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Sub-total	451.897	6.19
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Total	7296.191	100.00
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The budgetary outlay for the fiscal year 1998-99 projected at Nu.7296.19 m is 14% more than the revised outlay of Nu.6389.29 m for the 1997-98 fiscal year. The current expenditure at Nu. 2849.92 m is only 5.2% higher than the revised 1997-98 figure of Nu.2709.30 m reflecting the government's success over expenditure control. It may, however, be pointed out that the Royal Government has never compromised quality to keep expenditure under control. On the contrary, the policy is to consolidate and improve the quality rather than expansion of facilities.

The capital expenditure for 1998-99 at Nu. 4149.36 m is a substantial increase of 24% over the revised outlay of Nu. 3351.14 m for the previous fiscal year. This is mainly on account of the inclusion of several major projects, the implementation of which could not be started in 1997-98 as projected earlier. As reported in the past, the most important aspect of our annual budgets is the balance between revenue and current expenditure. The Ministry of Finance is once again proud to report to the honourable members of the National Assembly that the domestic revenue for 1998-99 conservatively projected at Nu.3094.08 m is more than 8% higher than the current expenditure outlay of Nu. 2849.92 m. Even during 1997-98, revenue exceeded current expenditure by 6%. The national goal of meeting current expenditure from domestic revenue was also achieved during the 7th Plan.

External borrowings at Nu. 451.90 m show an increase of about 31% over the 1997-98 level reflecting mainly increased disbursements of both bilateral and multilateral loans. These are soft term loans with substantial grant elements and are used for construction of schools and power projects.

The fiscal year 1998-99 is poised to be yet another year with a current revenue surplus enabling the Ministry of Finance to avoid domestic borrowings and to keep the budget deficit at zero level. The Royal Government continues to follow sound fiscal management practices thereby ensuring growth with stability.

Revenue

The revenue target for the 8th Plan approved by the National Assembly is Nu. 15912.0 m. During the 7th Plan period revenue collections increased on the average at 11% per annum even though tax rates had not been increased. The increased collections were the results of an expanded tax base and improved tax administration. The revenue collection in 1997-1998 was Nu. 2860.28 m which was an increase of 25% over the 1996-1997 figure. This was made possible mainly by the doubling of the Chhukha power tariff and increased earnings from public sector industries and other projects. The revenue projected for 1998-99 is Nu. 3094.08 m which is an increase of 8% and exceeds the growth of the GDP.

As reported many times in the past, the Bhutanese still remain amongst the least taxed people in the world and yet enjoy most of the essential services either free or at highly subsidized rates. The rural people, who constitute over 80% of the population contribute only 0.2% of the total revenue and the business income tax constitutes a paltry 5%. It is now time that the Bhutanese people started paying in some measure towards the national revenue. The low rate of taxes and subsidy on service charges or fees threaten the very sustainability of essential services. Nearly all the donors particularly the multi-lateral financial institutions are seriously concerned about sustainability and were against excessive subsidy in direct or indirect form. Hence the donors, almost without exception, insist upon levying of appropriate levels of user charges and the progressive elimination of subsidy as a pre-condition, for their financial support. It is therefore, necessary for Bhutan to take steps to steadily increase domestic power tariff and other user charges and fee over time to reduce subsidy elements.

The existing tax regulations are inadequate and susceptible to manipulations. We must therefore, streamline our tax policy and ensure that those who earn more also pay more taxes. Tax after all is an important tool to ensure equity in society through its effect upon redistribution of income. The Ministry of Finance, therefore, proposes to introduce Personal Income Tax during the fiscal year 1999-2000. The Ministry of Finance is confident that a simple personal income tax system, with relatively low rates, will be easy to implement and have no adverse effects upon the economy.

With the liberalization of imports and foreign exchange availability, the demand for third country imports including unnecessary luxury items has suddenly surged and threatens rapid depletion of our foreign exchange reserves. Most of the imported items are meant for commercial purposes and must therefore, be treated on the same basis as similar items brought from India. It is now proposed to levy sales tax on all third country goods imported into Bhutan in addition to the existing duties. This will also be more in keeping with the spirit of free trade between Bhutan and India as goods from India are subject only to sales tax.

Balance of Payment and Reserves

In a country like Bhutan where the export potential is presently limited by infrastructure, shortage of skilled manpower and other weaknesses of the private sector, it is necessary to keep a close watch on the developments in the balance of payments and particularly on the current account fluctuations. Any increase in public or private expenditure inevitably leads to greater imports of goods and services as the domestic market is unable to meet the demand. The recent liberalization of imports and foreign exchange availability is adding further pressure upon the balance of payments situation.

The relatively high growth rates sustained over recent years was accompanied by rapid changes in both exports as well as imports. In fiscal year 1996-97, export earnings were valued at Nu. 3553.77 m while imports reached Nu. 4546.42 m. The overall balance of payments, however, was favorable with a surplus of Nu. 971.21 m or the equivalent of US 27.0 m.

The Bhutanese economy, inspite of market diversifications as well as significant increases in imports, continues to record surpluses in the balance of payments. As a result of the favourable balance of payments surpluses, total external reserves of the nation grew by 26.7% and reached level of US\$ 215.42 m as compared to a level of US\$

170.0m in fiscal year 1996-97. The Rupee component of the reserves increased to Rs. 1644.7 m as compared to Rs. 900.0 m for the same period.

The Ministry of Finance is pleased to report to the honourable members of the National Assembly that our reserves are adequate to meet twenty four months of import requirements, which is far better than the position of most countries in the world and has greatly enhanced the achievement of our national goal of self-reliance.

External Debt

The Royal Government has always pursued a policy of caution regarding public debt particularly external loans. Loans have been resorted to only when grants are not available and that too mainly soft term loans for income generating activities like power projects or industries. The hard currency debt, presently outstanding, is US\$ 85.0 m and the debt servicing cost per annum, about US\$ 7.0 m. The Rupee loan outstanding on account of the Chhukha power project is Rs. 875.5 m and the debt servicing requirement, Rs. 141 m per year. The total debt service ratio is 13% which is sustainable and will not create undue debt burden upon the Royal Government. Bhutan has reserves in excess of the external debt and is in a position to repay the entire debt in a lumpsum if so require.

The external debt situation is, however, likely to change immensely in the near future as several large loans particularly for the Tala and the Kurichhu power projects will be disbursed. There will also be substantial hard currency loans for the Basochhu power project. These loans are all for income generating activities and hence will considerably increase the national revenue and further strengthen the financial position of the government.

External borrowing for developmental activities such as rural electrification, construction of school buildings and roads will also increase as grant assistance for such investments are not adequately forthcoming. Such investments in social infrastructure are necessary as the Royal Government attaches high priority to improving the well-being and livelihood of the Bhutanese people.

Financial Sector Development

Bhutan was fortunate to have recognized the magnitude and problems of non-performing loans being faced by the financial institutions before the matter assumed crisis proportions. All honourable members of the National Assembly must have heard of the

crises which has devastated the economics of some of the most successful and prosperous nations in South East Asia. While there were various other reasons, one of the main problems which triggered off the recession and currency devaluations were the poor performances of the financial institutions and high external debt. Bhutan has only four financial institutions and as such we must ensure that each institution is managed efficiently and follows sound principles. Resolving the issue of non-performing loans through the normal legal channels as well as the Loan Commission, specially constituted under Royal Command, has already helped to ease the problems for both the financial institutions as well as the borrowers.

Looking at the disastrous impact of the recent economic crisis in South East Asian countries, Bhutan was fortunate to have addressed the issue of non-performing loans with timely interventions under the Command of His Majesty the King. Had the issue not been tackled in time, the consequences on our economy would have been severe given the limited number and size of our financial institutions.

Most of the non-performing loans were a legacy of the past when proper appraisal mechanisms and sound management practices were not properly instituted. Management boards have now been strengthened and procedures well streamlined. Moreover the Royal Monetary Authority, in addition to issuing policies and guidelines, carries out regular supervision of the financial institutions to ensure sound management practices.

The Royal Government, in order to streamline the financial sector and to encourage competition, have also liberalized interest rates. All lending as well as deposit rates are now determined by the respective boards of each financial institution in keeping with cost of funds and other policy considerations. This is expected to usher in competition and make the financial institutions more dynamic and responsive to ground realities.

In its seriousness to reform and strengthen the financial sector to achieve world standards, the Royal Government in an unprecedented gesture permitted the Asian Development Bank and the City Bank to acquire equity shares in the newly established Bhutan National Bank to the extent of 20% each. This move is expected to give the BNB an international flavour and benefit from the experience, expertise and global network of the external partners. It was necessary to make the BNB capable of conducting international transactions which is a necessity for the diversification and growth of the economy of Bhutan.

The process of strengthening the financial sector through guidance and supervision of the RMA and technical assistance of donors has helped to improve the management capability of the financial institutions. Bhutanese financial institutions are now set to enter a phase characterized by professional competence, sound policies and greater accountability. Internal capability alone, however, cannot ensure excellence as the financial institutions also need the appropriate legal framework within which loan agreements can be enforced. It is therefore, necessary for Bhutan to enact legislations. Unless the legal framework exists, the financial institutions will be at a disadvantage and be unable to fulfill their mandate of mobilizing savings and promoting investments. Strong financial institutions are indispensable for the strengthening of the private sector and overall growth of the economy.

Private Sector Development

In an effort to boost the development of the private sector, the Royal Government continues to provide support for training and entrepreneurship development programs. While small service oriented businesses are growing we are yet to witness any significant development in the manufacturing sector. With the liberalization of imports and foreign exchange, there was an upsurge in the number of small importers engaging mainly in luxury consumer goods. Export business, particularly for hard currency markets, on the other hand, remains stagnant with the private sector showing very little progress.

The small size of the domestic market and the subsequent lack of investment opportunities is perhaps the biggest obstacle to the emergence of a dynamic business sector. Even the financial institutions continue to face problems of excess liquidity caused by lack of adequate demand for loans for bankable activities. This is evidence of low level of economic activities and a weak private sector. It is, however, expected that the opportunities presented by the mega projects like the Tala, Kurichhu and Basochhu hydropower projects and the Dungsum cement project would foster the development of a more dynamic private sector that is capable of becoming the engine of growth for the national economy.

The Royal Government of its part remains committed to the strengthening of the private sector and will continue to pursue policies and programs to uplift the private sector. The private sector must sooner or later assume the main responsibility for economic growth, employment and generally conducting any commercial activity. With this in mind, the

Royal Government has decided to offer its remaining shares in the RICB, the PCA and STCB, which are all highly profitable, to the private sector. In keeping with the Commands of His Majesty the King, shares will be sold in an equitable manner through the Royal Stock Exchange giving preference to small buyers, particularly from the Dzongkhags outside Thimphu and Phuentsholing.

The policy of His Majesty the King to promote development of a broad-based private sector will be possible only in a conducive environment where equal opportunities exist for all interested parties. Hence it is necessary for the Royal Government to frame rules and regulations that are liberal and transparent. No efforts will be spared to build up a broad-based and dynamic private sector to shoulder the responsibility of enhancing the productive capacity of the nation and to provide gainful employment to future generations.

Pension Scheme

All honourable members are fully aware of the great importance that the Royal Government attaches to having a small, competent and honest civil service. In order to make the civil service attractive and to further improve their well-being, the Royal Government approved substantial increase in the pay and allowances of civil servants during the last two fiscal years. His Majesty the King, however, felt that the existing retirement benefits, namely the gratuity and the provident fund, were inadequate and commanded the Ministry of Finance to study the feasibility of instituting a pension scheme. Accordingly, the Ministry of Finance, with technical assistance of the UNDP, carried out a study to see what kind of a pension scheme would be feasible for Bhutan keeping in mind benefits to the civil servants and costs to the government.

His Majesty the King was pleased to Command in a Kasho issued on the 3rd day of the fourth Bhutanese month to the Royal Civil Service Commission that in order to encourage the civil servants to be loyal and dedicated to the government and the country, it was the desire of the Royal Government to improve the overall welfare of the civil servants including their post-service benefits. As per the present rules, retiring civil servants are entitled to the accumulated amount in their Provident Fund account and a lumpsum gratuity with an upper ceiling of Nu. 100,000.00. In line with the changing times, it was necessary to review the merits of increasing the gratuity limit vis-a-vis introduction of a pension scheme, keeping in mind the costs to the government and resulting benefits to the retiring employees. His Majesty was pleased to Command that

the two options be thoroughly reviewed by the members of the RCSC and the Ministry of Finance. His Majesty also desired that the views of the civil servants be taken into account in arriving at the final recommendation.

Economic Prospects

Our country is small and landlocked with no direct access to the sea and face problems related to transport infrastructure, manpower constraints and the small size of the domestic market. Our country is, however, blessed with abundant mineral resources, great physical beauty, vast hydropower potential and a natural environment that is the envy of the world. Above all else, Bhutan is blessed with an enlightened leadership and a stable government that is fully committed to improving the well-being of the people. Moreover, the success of planned development particularly in the area of infrastructure, education and power have prepared the ground for enhanced economic activities. We have all the ingredients necessary to enter the new millennium with a successful program for unprecedented growth and prosperity.

Bhutan not only has the potential but there is also as emerging need to promote growth and investment to provide opportunities for employment of the thousands of young people who will enter the labour market every year. The mega- projects by themselves will not be able to absorb all these job seekers to come on stream to provide employment and to widen the productive base of the economy.

Given the small size of the domestic market, the potential for growth can be realized only through foreign trade with India and other countries. Bhutan must compete with the rest of the world for capital, technology and export markets even in India. The competitiveness of Bhutan will be determined by the quality of the products and the price at which they are sold. In order to enhance competitiveness, Bhutan must improve the productivity of labour through development of skills and use of modern technology. In this regard, it is necessary for Bhutan to continue giving high priority to education in general and promoting technical education in particular. The recent decision of His Majesty the King to upgrade the Royal Bhutan Polytechnic at Dewathang to a full-fledged engineering college is most appropriate and timely.

Integration into the world economy whether by choice or not is inevitable and has already happened and we cannot avoid the adverse effects of globalization. We must, therefore,

adopt a strategy whereby we are in a position to benefit from the advantages of globalization through appropriate policy measures. The main strategy should be to promote export led growth and free trade. It is of utmost importance for Bhutan to promote hard currency earnings which are required for debt servicing, increased imports and financing of high-tech capital equipment needed for further growth.

Conclusion

As a result of the sound fiscal management practices, the financial year 1998-99 is almost certain to be another year of success with a current revenue surplus. With the success achieved during the first and second year, we can be confident about achieving the 8th Plan objectives including the financial targets.

The economy is also poised for higher growth as a result of the increased government expenditure as well as the acceleration of the implementation of the various mega projects. The private sector will enjoy unprecedented opportunities for business in transportation, housing, supplies, contract works and construction.

In addition to the success achieved in mobilising domestic resources, Bhutan continues to receive generous support from our development partners. In spite of the rather dismal aid situation elsewhere in the world, the level of external assistance to Bhutan is on the increase due to Bhutan's outstanding record of success and proper aid utilization. The Royal Government would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to all our friendly donor countries and multilateral aid agencies for the generous technical and financial support extended to the people of Bhutan. We are particularly grateful to our traditional friend and close neighbour India for their genuine goodwill and support rendered since the beginning of planned development in Bhutan.

Bhutan is now about to enter an era of unprecedented growth and prosperity as a result of the large investments, improved infrastructure, availability of manpower and the generally favourable socio-economic conditions.

What is important now is to preserve the environment of peace and tranquillity that prevails inspite of the continuing Ngolop threat. We are confident that as long as the people are loyal and place their trust in the leadership of His Majesty the King, no threat of any magnitude will ever harm the security of our country.

May the blessing of the guardian deities of the Palden Drukpa and the hard work and enlightened leadership of our beloved King continue to bring peace and prosperity to the people of Bhutan for all time to come.

MONETARY AND FINANCIAL INDICATORS

Sl. No.	Items	1996-97 Actual	1997-98 Estimate	Percent Change	
		<u>Millions of Ngultrums</u>			
1.	<u>Total Assets</u>	12539.4	14993.3	19.6	<u>of the Finan</u>
	<u>cial Sector</u>				
	a. Royal Mon				
	etary Authority	5349.2	6152.4	15.0	
	b. Four Financial				
	Institutions	7190.2	8840.9	23.0	
II.	<u>Money Supply</u>	4277.7	5432.7	27.0	a. Time Deposits
	2191.7		3519.4	60.6	b. Demand
	Deposit	1331.9	1175.7	-11.7	c. Ngultrum in
	Circulation	626.0	737.6	17.8	
III.	<u>Domestic Credit</u>	1534.7	1925.1	25.4	of which to
	Private Sector	1097.1	1299.8	18.5	

<u>Millions of US</u>				
<u>Dollar</u>				
IV.	<u>Gross I</u>			
	<u>nternational</u>			
	<u>Reserves</u>	170.0	215.4	26.7
a.	Convertible			
	Currencies	145.0	174.0	20.0
<u>Millions of</u>				
<u>Rupee</u>				
b.	Indian Rupee	900.0	1644.7	82.7
<u>Ngultrum per US</u>				
<u>Dollar</u>				
V.	<u>Exchange</u>			
	<u>Rate for US \$</u>			
	<u>(Period Average)</u>	35.8	39.7	10.9

MONETARY AND FINANCIAL INDICATORS

Sl.	Items	1996-97	1197-98	No.
<u>In Percent</u>				
VI.	Structure of			
	Interest Rates			
	Deposit Rates			
(i)	Savings	5.0	5.0-7.0	(ii)
				Fixed Deposits
				3 months to 1
year	8.0	8.0-8.5		1 year to less than

3 years	10.0	10.0-10.5	More than 3
years 11.0	11.0-11.5		

Lending Rates

(i) Export Finance	13.0	13.0	(ii) Manufacturing,
Services,			Transport,
Agriculture 13.0		13.0	
(iii) Housing	14.0	14.0	(iv) Working Capital
15.0 15.0		(v) Personal and	
General Trade	16.0	16.0	

Interest rates have been deregulated since October 1997. Hence, the financial institutions will, in future, set their own interest rates for deposits as well as lending
