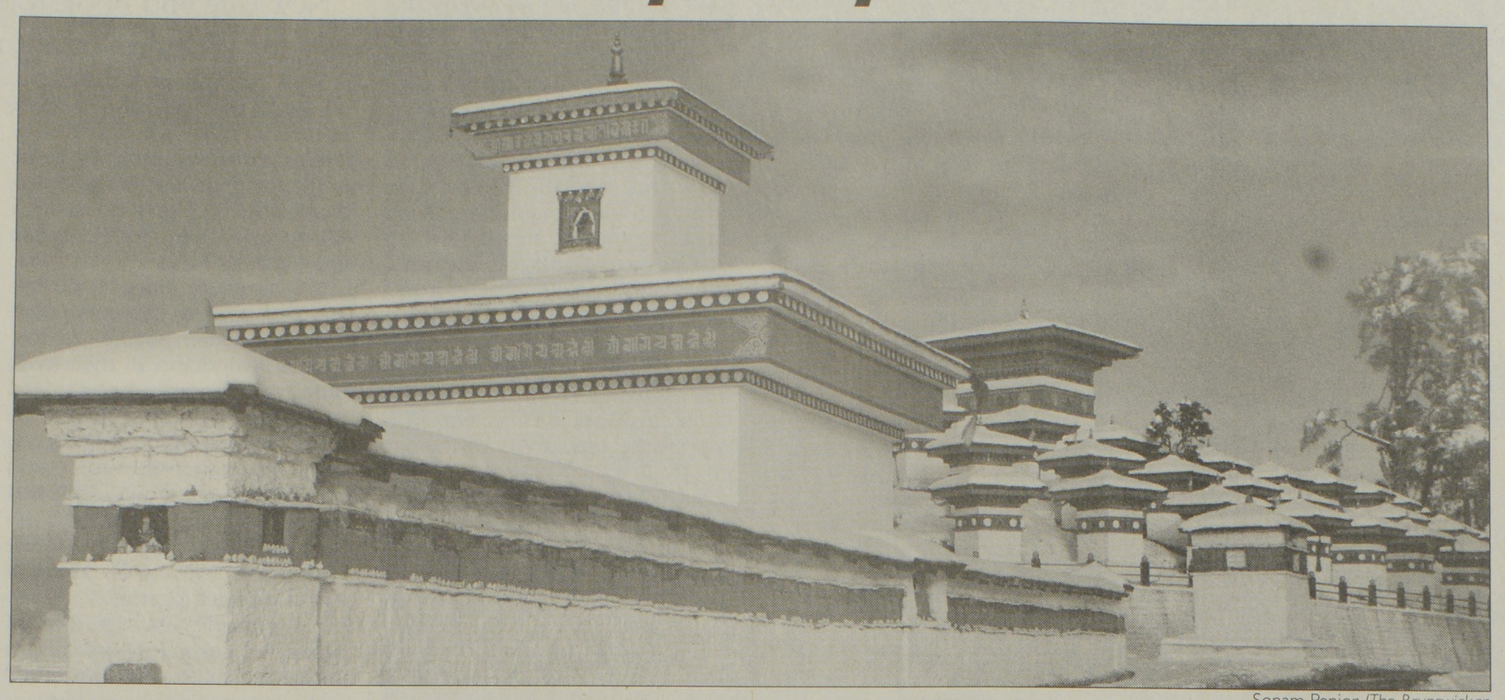
Prince proves true royality is all in the attitude

by Sonam Maekay Penjor



Sonam Penjor /*The Brunswickan*

His Royal Highness Trongsa Penlop Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Crown Prince of Bhutan, is a prince with a personal touch. A few years ago in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan, I happened to enter a store as His Highness was leaving. As a mark of respect, I opened the door for His Highness, but the Crown Prince instead held the door and asked me to come in. This struck a chord with me, as I was touched by his considerate gesture. In a world where leaders lack a human element, this action was symbolic.

Better known to the natives as Druk-Yul, Bhutan is the only country to retain the Tantric form of Mahayana Buddhism. A tiny Buddhist kingdom in the Eastern Himalayas, Bhutan is strategically placed between China (bordering Tibet) and India, two of the world's most populous nations. Being one of the few nations in the world not to be colonized, and sandwiched between two regional superpowers, Bhutan has managed to remain sovereign while nations around it lost their independence. Although the natural geography did play a role in Bhutan's independence, it was the visionary leadership of the monarchs who made sound decisions on behalf of the kingdom that made the biggest difference.

People from around the globe are attracted to Bhutan by the snow-capped peaks, lush emerald valleys, ancient monasteries, unique architecture and vibrant culture. Known for its excellent environmental record, His Majesty and the people of Bhutan received the Champions of the Earth Award from the United Nations Environment Programme this year for their commitment to placing the environment at the centre of the country's constitution and all its development plans. As mandated by the National Assembly, Bhutan's Parliament, the country will maintain a forest cover of 60 per cent at all times; at present more than 72 per cent of its land is under forest cover and 26 per cent of this cover is designated as protected areas. It is sometimes called "the last Shangri-la" for its unspoiled natural environment. Being identified as one of the ten bio-diversity hot spots in the world, and as one of the 221 global endemic bird areas, Bhutan is home to over 770 species of birds and over 50 species of rhododendron.

His Royal Highness Trongsa Penlop Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is heir to the golden throne of Bhutan at a time when the Kingdom is facing a crucial change in the country's 357 years of history. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck is perhaps the only monarch in the world to voluntarily bestow his powers to the people seven years ago. The Bhutanese Parliament, the National Assembly, unanimously voiced their reluctance towards a Constitutional Monarchy. In a region where poverty and corruption breed instability, the people of Bhutan view the monarchy as a unifying factor, and a source of stability in the region.

Having met His Highness a few years ago in Bhutan, his visit to UNB was nostalgic, like meeting a close friend one has lost touch with, and I was reminded again of what true royalty means; he is royal by his actions and his thoughtfulness. On his arrival in Fredericton on October 18, having traveled half way around the world, jet-lagged and tired, he still invited all Bhutanese students who were gathered to greet him at the Delta hotel into his suite. Making everyone feel comfortable, he spoke with all the Bhutanese students for over forty minutes.

"I have not been home recently or I would have made you homesick with news from home," His Highness joked.

The next day, October 19, I had the honor of accompanying His Highness on a tour of the UNB campus. Reaching the Student Union Building, I talked about the popularity of Tim Horton's coffee in Canada, and hearing this, His Highness said, "I must try this coffee." A few minutes later, His Highness had a cup of Tim Horton's in his hands. While we were waiting to get His Highness a cup of coffee, he said, "I am beginning to feel a deep liking for this place, and I am not being diplomatic."

His Highness hosted a dinner for all Bhutanese students on October 20 after the convocation ceremony. The Bhutanese students at the university were proud and happy guests at the dinner. What stood out to me the most was how the Crown Prince was able to make each and every one of us feel special. His Highness took individual pictures with all the Bhutanese students, who numbered at least 40. After dinner, His Majesty said, "you all are lucky to study at a place that loves Bhutan so much. Nowhere else do you see such warmth; please do make good use of this opportunity."

At the University of New Brunswick's 51st fall Convocation, His Royal Highness Trongsa Penlop Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. After receiving the award, His Royal Highness told the gathering of about 400 graduates, the faculty and students that the award carried important symbolism.

"It is a symbol of the goodwill that exists between Bhutan and Canada and a tribute to the dedication and commitment of the many Bhutanese who have studied at this university and returned to Bhutan to work," he said. "It also signifies the university's unwavering commitment in sharing the benefits of education around the world."

After the Convocation ceremony, the Board of Governors of the university hosted a lunch in honor of Trongsa Penlop, whose visit coincided with the 20th anniversary of the university's partnership with Bhutan. About 60 Bhutanese have graduated from the University of New Brunswick since 1985.

On October 21, a group of 10 UNB students were invited to have dinner with His Highness at the Delta hotel. Students who attended the dinner were touched by the humility and kindness of the Crown Prince. In Bhutan, Gross National Happiness is a more accurate measure of the country's prosperity than its Gross Domestic Product.

"Gross National Happiness is not a development index but a national conscience," said His Highness. "Bhutan can pass laws to preserve the environment, but if we make environmentalists out of every Bhutanese, that will be the essence," he added.

Talking about the development plans taking place in Bhutan, His Highness said, "I do not set goals of five years or ten years for Bhutan's benchmark for performance. But if we are able to give our children what we had, and our children are able to give their children what we had, that would be success."

At the conclusion of dinner, His Highness personally invited everyone to Bhutan. "If you are ever anywhere near our region, or in Bhutan, you must see me. I will be very upset if you do not," he said. Each student also received a personal business card with His Highness' personal email address and was asked to keep in touch.

His Highness the Crown Prince symbolizes modern Bhutan as we undergo one of the most historic transformations in our official 357-year history. While Bhutan seeks to balance cultural values and traditions with material development, we are confident in our future monarch's middle path development philosophy.

His Highness did his schooling in Bhutan like an average Bhutanese with a good grounding in cultural values, and completed his Masters at Oxford in 2003. Having the best of both worlds, His Highness understands the future of Bhutan, as he himself is part of this change. When Bhutanese see their Crown Prince, they know that Bhutan will be in safe hands. If the world had more leaders like His Highness, we would think globally as one people of the world.

So, what is Bhutan's role in the 21st century? To quote His Highness's Convocation address, "to be a conscience of the world, committing to global peace, sustaining the environment and good governance and holding on to [our] values."

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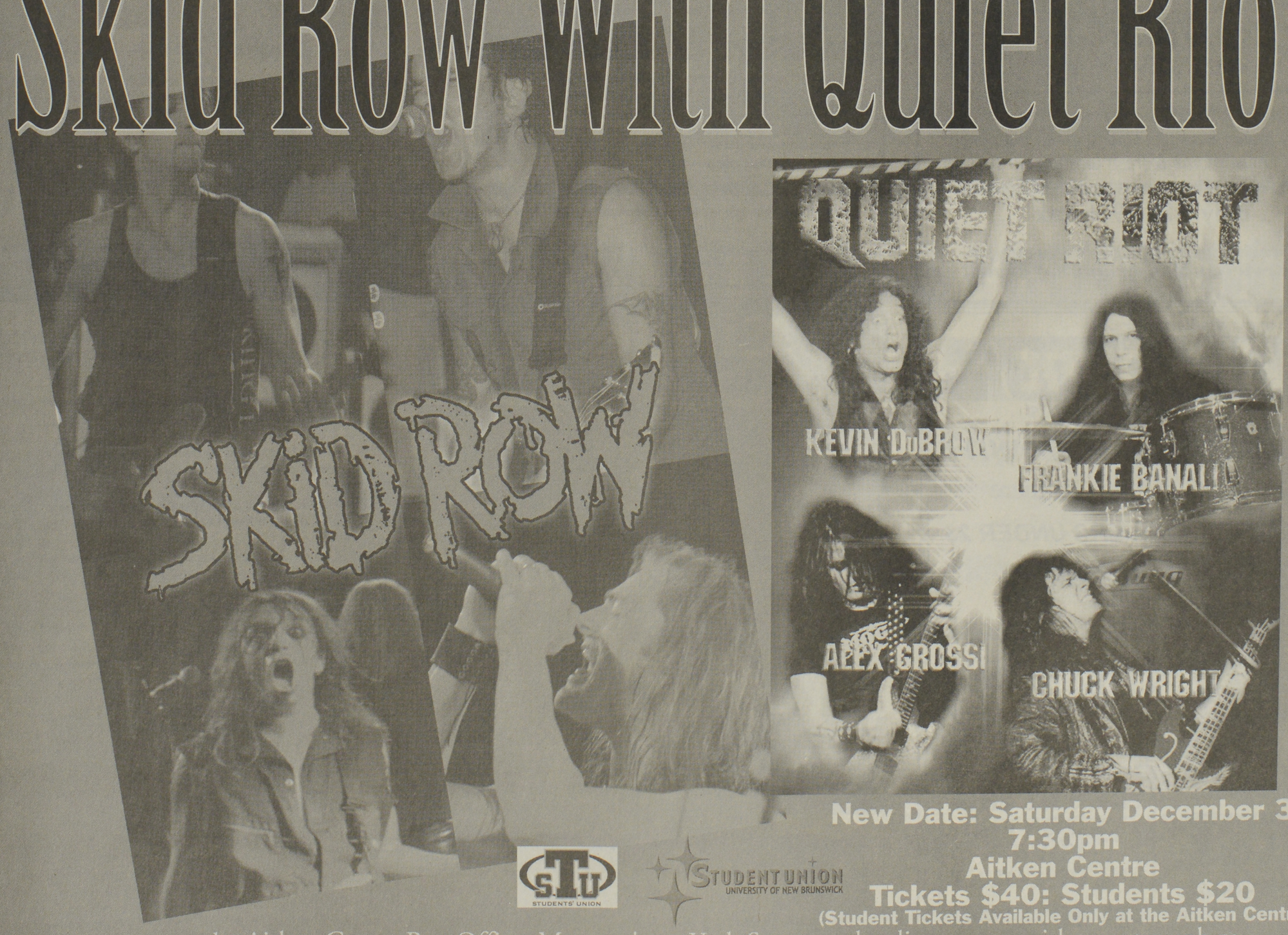
Cliff Turcott, project manager from 74 Construction Troop, 4ESR. Though bringing the building's internal systems up to a workable standard was no easy task, Turcott and his soldiers were happy to come out and support the community venture.

"It was an excellent job; [there were] a lot of challenges with this project," said Turcott. "Also, it was very good training for us because when we get deployed overseas, we get the exact same scenario, where we have an older building, and we have to bring it up to code so the troops can inhabit it."

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