

**Philanthropist funds forestry studies**  
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**A portrait by VAST depicting SAF founder Madanjeet Singh's vision to unite South Asia through education**

**Madanjeet Singh Centre 18 March, 2010 -** UNESCO goodwill ambassador and the founder of South Asia foundation (SAF), Madanjeet Singh, has committed to donate USD 1 million to help start a centre for South Asia forestry studies in Bhutan.

Madanjeet Singh, who is on a four-day visit, is in the capital to help start a centre for forestry studies with the Ugyen Wangchuck forestry institute for conservation (UWFIC) in Lamigoenpa, Bumthang. "We'll start the Madanjeet Singh centre for forestry as a part of UWFIC as soon as we get the fund," said UWFIC director, Nawang.

Over a period of five years, SAF will contribute USD 500,000 for establishment and operations of the Madanjeet Singh centre for south Asia forestry studies (MCSAFS) while Mr Singh will contribute USD 500,000 from his personal account.

The MCSAFS at UWFIC would offer diploma, BSc and MSc courses in forestry, in collaboration with centre for natural resources, Lobesa. It would also facilitate and conduct research in areas related to forestry with relevance to South Asia.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed yesterday between the founder, agriculture minister, Lyonpo (Dr) Pema Gyamtsho and the SAF Bhutan chapter chairman, Sangay Ngedup, in Thimphu.

"This institute will help south Asian students, who'd be given at least eight fully paid group scholarships to study in Bhutan," Madanjeet Singh said. "They can interact with each other and know more about different cultures and traditions, which is a new way of knowing each other," he said.

Mr Singh, who first visited Bhutan in 1964, said that it was in Bhutan that the idea to start a foundation was generated. "It has been the nucleus of this foundation and I'm very glad that this task of having a centre for excellence in Bhutan has been established," he said. "I hope that this will be my legacy."

SAF, with the help of Mr Singh, has already established 12 centres for excellence in South Asia, such as the Madanjeet Singh institute of south Asian regional cooperation (MISARC) in Pondicherry, Asian college of journalism in Chennai, Art college in Pakistan, environmental institute in Maldives and water studies in Sri Lanka.

The agriculture and forestry services minister, Lyonpo (Dr) Pema Gyamtsho, assured that the centre would be a world-renowned institution. "We'd like to thank you for the big difference you made in the lives of our young artists, journalists and scouts," the SAF Bhutan chapter

chairman added.

Mr Singh has also requested the education ministry to set up a committee, who would grant group scholarships to most deserving students in Bhutan, who would then study with other students, a boy and a girl from each SAARC countries, at the centre.

“This will build a good society, expand the scoop of understanding ideas of education amongst the peoples of south Asia and beyond,” minister of education, Lyonpo Thakur S Powdyel said.

“With the maintenance of a good environment record and forested area never gone below 60 percent, it was decided among SAF members to choose Bhutan as a spot to set up the forestry study centre,” Secretary of SAF Bhutan chapter, Lham Nidup, said.

Founded by Madanjeet Singh, SAF, a secular, non-profit and non-political organisation was established in September 2000 for regional cooperation through education and sustainable development.

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