

NATIONAL DAY OF BHUTAN

The Daily Star

Special Supplement

December 18, 1993

The Country

THE Kingdom of Bhutan covers an approximate area of 46,500 square kilometres: roughly 150 km north to south and 300 km east to west. However, because of the mountainous terrain, the actual distance on the ground is more than twice as long. The Kingdom is bordered by the Tibetan region of China and the Indian States of Sikkim, West Bengal, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh.

preciated by both Bhutanese and the outside world. Many tree species are of high timber quality, while others are tapped for resin. Over 300 species largely of alpine plants are used in Bhutanese traditional medicine. Horticulturalists all over the world also prize Bhutanese flora: 168 species were introduced to Europe from Bhutan, including many wild relatives of cultivar species strawberries,

until Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyel (1594-1652) unified the country into one nation in the early 17th century. He established a theocracy and gave Bhutan an administrative system, and a code of law. During the period of theocracy from 1652 to 1907, there were approximately fifty-five Dsides (monk-rulers). The theocracy Shabdrung built ended in 1907 when Ugyen Wangchuk (1862-1926) was elected as the first King of Bhutan by popular consensus.

Throughout its history, Bhutan has remained independent, being one of the few countries in Asia never to become a colony. Bhutan was fairly isolated from the outside world until the 1960s when the third King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1928-1972) opened links with other countries and initiated the development of a modern economy.

RELIGION: Buddhism was introduced in Bhutan in 7th century by Guru Padma Sambhawa. In the centuries that followed, Bhutan was home to many sages and saints including the great saints-scholars such as Longchen Jamjam, also known as Kuenkhen Longchen Ramjam, (1308-1363) and Pema Lingpa (1450-1521). Various schools of Buddhism in Bhutan assimilated other earlier practices and beliefs. The aspirations towards enlightenment and the belief in the innate goodness of human beings are widely shared among Buddhists and majority of the Bhutanese are Buddhists. Hinduism is another important religion, particularly in Southern Bhutan.

POPULATION: The 1990 population has been estimated at 600,000. Depending on the fertility and mortality assumptions adopted, population is projected to rise to between 713,211 and 768,050 by 1997. As in most developing countries, the proportion of the population under 15 is high: at 40%, unless the population can be encouraged to practice family planning.

SETTLEMENTS: Bhutan is the least populated country in South Asia. However most of the population is concentrated in the valleys and large areas in the north of the country are virtually empty except for nomadic herders.

Most Bhutanese still live in villages in an extended family system or maintain strong links with their rural families. The average size of the household or family is estimated to be 8.5. The number of houses per village varies from 2 to 100 with an average of 43. Thimphu in Western Bhutan is the capital with an estimated population of 40,000-50,000 people. The other main urban settlements are Gaylphug, Phuntsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar.

TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS: Bhutan's total road network measures 2,674 km and the main motor routes consist of an east-west highway and three north-south highways. The road network connects all 18 dzongkhag (district) headquarters and 12 dungkhags. Major towns and villages are also connected by motor roads. However the majority of settlements can only be reached by mule tracks and foot trails, as well as cantilever and suspension bridges. Although horses are the main beast of burden, yaks and oxen are used for transportation in some parts of Bhutan. Only one airport, at Paro, is in regular use. The national airline, Druk Air provides services to Dhaka, Kathmandu, Delhi, Calcutta and Bangkok.

Telecommunication services consist of telephone, telegraph, telex and civil wireless.

INSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK: An enlightened monarch rules Bhutan through Lhengyel Shungtshog (Cabinet), Tshogdu (National Assembly) and the civil service. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk is the Head of the Government as well as the State.

People

HISTORY: Stone implements indicate the country was inhabited as early as 2000-1500 B.C. (Aris, 1979). Although Bhutan's history since 7th century is becoming increasingly known, its more ancient history remains to be brought to light. The country consisted of small but independent principalities



His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk
Profile

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk was born in Dechencholing Palace, Thimphu, on November 11, 1955. After having received his early education in Bhutan he studied briefly at St Joseph's School, Darjeeling. He then proceeded to England for further studies and finally returned to Bhutan and joined the Ugyen Wangchuk Academy at Paro, where his education included familiarisation with the Kingdom's rich spiritual and cultural heritage.

As Crown Prince, he began to shoulder responsibilities from a very tender age. From 1972, at the age of 16, he began to participate in the meetings of the Cabinet, and was appointed the first Chairman of the Planning Commission. On May 5, 1972 he was installed as Tongsa Penlop. He acceded to the throne at the age of 17, after the late King, His Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk passed away in Nairobi, Kenya, on June 21, 1972. He was formally coronated on June 2, 1974, when Heads of States of neighbouring countries and representatives of numerous friendly countries attended the coronation celebrations.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk is one of the youngest leaders in the world. His Majesty has the distinction of combining in his person a deep love for the kingdom's cultural and natural heritage with an equal appreciation of the need to harness modern science and technology for the kingdom's progress. As a benevolent, hardworking and sagacious leader, His Majesty travels regularly throughout the Kingdom to study and ascertain the problems, needs, and aspirations of his people. Whether in Thimphu or on tour, His Majesty is freely accessible to the humblest of his subjects, and he takes personal pains to redress their grievances and to promote their welfare. A strong believer in peoples participation, His Majesty has decentralised the administration in order to involve the people in the decision making process of the country's economic development. His magnanimity is demonstrated in his belief that the Gross National Happiness of the people is as important as the Gross National Product. As a keen conservationist, His Majesty has done much to preserve the Kingdom's rich flora and fauna.

His Majesty's reign has been marked by peace, progress, and prosperity within the Kingdom, gradually expanding contacts and enhancing cooperation with the outside world in diverse fields.

His father the late King once said, "If I were to say a prayer, I would wish that in my son's lifetime the people of my country become far more prosperous and happy than they are today." Under the benevolent, far-sighted and sagacious leadership of His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuk, that wish has certainly been fulfilled.



The Queen Mother (third from left) and members of the royal family



An ancient watchtower, now houses the National Museum of Bhutan.

MESSAGE

It is indeed a great honour for me to say a few words on the occasion of our 86th National Day which falls on December 17, 1993.

I would like to express my appreciation to The Daily Star for having taken the initiative of bringing out a Special Supplement on this auspicious occasion.

Although I have only recently arrived as Bhutan's representative to the People's Republic of Bangladesh, I have had the opportunity to visit Bangladesh many times in the past under different capacities. I first visited Bangladesh in 1974. I am happy to see that the last two decades have brought remarkable progress to Bangladesh. There have been tremendous improvements in the socio-economic condition of the people. The efforts made by the people and the Government of Bangladesh to this end, particularly in recent years, is highly commendable.

The friendly relations between Bangladesh and Bhutan dates back since the dawn of Bangladesh's independence. Ties between our two countries have been moulded by common history, religion and culture. This has been further strengthened by our farsighted leaders who with wisdom and vision have forged new bonds of trust and confidence.

As Bhutan's representative to Bangladesh and in my earlier capacities, I have personally experienced a spirit of trust, friendship and goodwill during my meetings with Government

officials and common man alike. I have every confidence that the relations between our two countries will grow from strength to strength.

Tashi Delek!



Lyonpo T Tobgyel
Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bhutan in Bangladesh

Bhutan-Bangladesh Trade Relations

THE Friendly relations between Bhutan and Bangladesh dates back to the dawn of Bangladesh's independence. Bhutan was the second country to recognize Bangladesh, and ever since, Bhutan has been keen to foster closer relations with Bangladesh.

In 1980 Bhutan and Bangladesh exchange resident Ambassadors and have since the strengthened their ties.

Close cooperation between the two countries led to the signing the Trade Agreement in 1980, whereby both the countries aspired to promote their bilateral trade. However, due to time involved in identifying viable transit routes, actual trade did not commence until 1988.

Despite a late start, trade between the two countries has developed significantly since then.

Bhutan's major exports to Bangladesh consist of fruits, fruit products, timber, dolomite, cement, limestone, stones and boulders, calcium carbide and coal.

On the other hand, Bangladesh's major exports to Bhutan consist of jute products, condensed milk, garments, edible oils, leather products, ceramic products and pharmaceuticals.

Trade between two countries over the last five years had been significantly in favour of Bhutan.

This imbalance would however be less if one takes into account the unaccounted imports by small traders and tourists who frequently visit Dhaka. It has been estimated that garments and other items worth

more than US \$ 1.5 million are imported annually into Bhutan by small traders and tourists of Bhutan.

Although the smallest of Bhutan's population and her economy have not favoured any large scale imports in the year, recent trends have been encouraging. A variety of products from Bangladesh that includes dairy products, jute carpets and products, garments, vegetable oils, leather products and ceramic products have been gaining popularity in Bhutan with consistent efforts by Bangladeshi exporters to take advantage of the favourable terms of trade between the two countries. Exports from Bangladesh to Bhutan could increase significantly, bridging the present imbalance if not be significantly in her favour in the near foreseeable future.

The Approach to Development

A PART from the obvious objective of development: to increase GDP at the national level and incomes at the household level, development in Bhutan includes the achievement of less quantifiable objectives. These include ensuring the spiritual and emotional well being of the population, the preservation of Bhutan's cultural heritage and its rich and varied natural resources. Although it is difficult to achieve progress for everybody at the same time. The Royal Government's development strategy is based on giving equal opportunities and equitable services to all members of society throughout the country.

The Government is able to take both a broader and a longer term view than individuals and firms normally can. The necessary measures and legislation will continue to be enforced to ensure that individuals' and firms' short term decisions do not have long term consequences that are nationally unacceptable (e.g. in environmental terms). At the same time, the Government will continue to invest in those activities necessary for the long term development of the economy which the private sector is unlikely to undertake. This may be due to the high risks involved, long pay-off period or because it is difficult to charge the beneficiaries: such activities include, for instance, agricultural and environmental research.

The Royal Government is determined that all regions and groups in the country should benefit from development. Popular participation in the planning and implementation of development is a way of ensuring that plans take account of popular concerns, draw on local knowledge and mobilise local resources for development.

The Royal Government has also made considerable efforts to decentralise administration and planning since the beginning of 5th Five Year Plan in 1981. Dzongkhag Yaragay Tshogchung were created in all the 18 dzongkhags which consist of elected members of the dzongkhags including gups, chimis and community leaders as well as dzongkhag authorities.

People are Bhutan's most important resource. Human resource development is both end in itself — since better health and education enable people to live more fulfilling lives — and a means of increasing Bhutan's development potential. The strategy for the Seventh Five Year Plans is (a) to ensure the widest possible access to basic health and education, while (b) selectively investing in the much more expensive development of higher skills and secondary level health facilities.

Although women are accorded equal status in Bhutanese society, their circumstances often place them at a disadvantage — they are much less likely than men to complete their schooling for example. Children's welfare strongly depends on the health and education of their mothers. Realising Bhutan's full human potential as well as ensuring that the whole population benefit from development, requires special efforts to involve women in development.

Environment and Sustainable Development

Bhutan is in a rare, possibly unique position amongst devel-

oping countries, in its preservation of a wide base of natural resources. Bhutan is also one of the countries with the greatest biological diversity, not only in terms of a large number of species, but also several species unique to Bhutan's environment. However, knowledge of the status of these species is limited as there have been few studies on Bhutanese flora and fauna.

The preservation of natural resources has been possible because of Bhutan's recent entry into the economic development process, the cause of environmental degradation in many developing countries. The maintenance of a traditional subsistence economy enabled preservation of the environment until the 1960s and despite economic growth rates of 7.5% in the last decade, the natural resource base has remained largely intact.

This has been the result of the RGOB's cautious approach to development and awareness of possible negative impacts on the environment. In addition, the fact that hydroelectric power has been the major source of economic growth has meant that development has had little impact on the environment to date.



A typical Bhutanese gateway at Phuolsholing



The terrain is among the most rugged and mountainous in the world, as most of the country includes part of the Himalayan ranges. The land rises from an elevation of about 160 metres above sea level in the south to more than 7,550 metres above sea level in the north. The variations in climate are correspondingly extreme. Southern Bhutan is generally hot and humid, while the high Himalayan mountains in northern borders of Bhutan are under perpetual snow. Climate can vary considerably between valleys and within valleys depending on levels of altitude. Rainfall, in particular, can differ within relatively short distances due to rain shadow effects.

Natural Resources

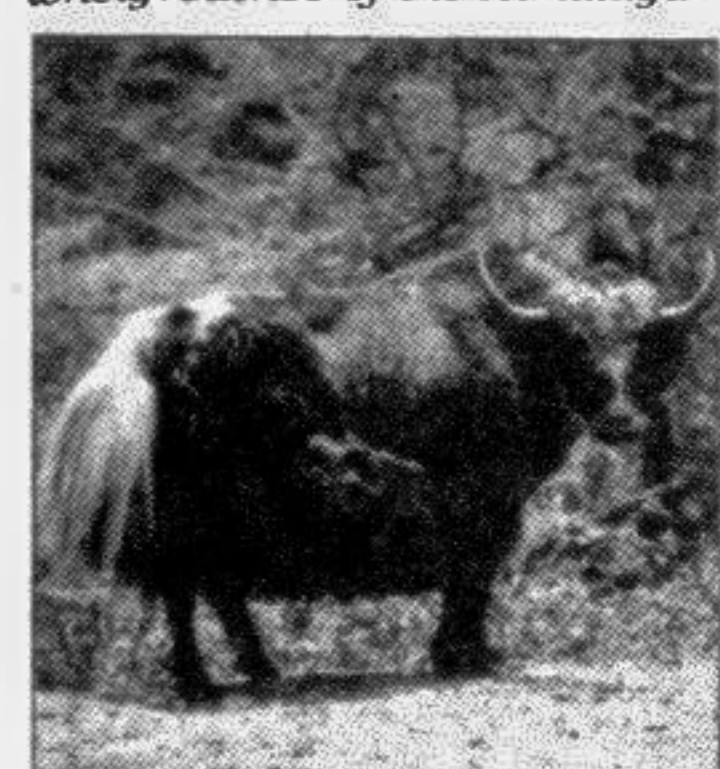
FLORA: The flora of Bhutan is exceptionally diverse as a result of a great range of altitudinal zones and varied climate conditions. An estimated 56% of the country is covered by forests of alpine scrub, fir, mixed coniferous species, temperate scrub, and broadleaf species. In addition to a wide range of species, there are many species unique to Bhutan: about 47 species have been listed and it is thought that there are many more which have not been identified. Moreover, much of Bhutan's flora has remained undisturbed so that Bhutan probably has the richest flora in the Himalayan region. The floral wealth of Bhutan is highly ap-

cherry, and apple. These plants have significant value as a genetic resource for crop improvement.

FAUNA: Because Bhutan's flora has remained undisturbed, a number of rare animals can still be found in Bhutan. The exact number of species is unknown, but over 160 species have been reported. Rare animals include the langur, takin and blue sheep and are distributed quite widely. Tigers,



The snow leopard found in the lonely reaches of the Himalaya



The yak

leopards, snow leopards, red panda, gaur, serow, Himalayan black bears, brown bears, wild pigs, musk deer and various kinds of deer are common in many parts of Bhutan. The Phobjikha valley in Western Bhutan is one of the three wintering grounds for the rare Black-necked crane. One quarter of the country has been declared as 12 protected reserves/sanctuaries/nature parks.

MINERALS: The exact magnitude of Bhutan's mineral resources is unknown, as only 30% of the country has been mapped geologically. Mineral prospecting has been undertaken mainly in southern foothills and inner Himalayas as prospecting in the other areas is constrained by lack of transport infrastructure. Geological mapping has indicated the occurrence of coal, limestone, dolomite, talc, marble, gypsum, slate, zinc, lead, copper, tungsten and quartzite deposits. Out of these, coal, limestone, dolomite, gypsum and quartzite are mined for domestic use and export.



Exotic rhubarb flower of the high Himalayas



Rhododendron, a common sight of Bhutan