

Country Background

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Buddhism has a significant influence on the values of the Bhutanese and has shaped the institutions, organizations, arts, drama, architecture, literature and social structure. Bhutan's culture, as in other societies, is continually transforming itself in the face of development.

Population

The 1990 population has been estimated at 600,000. A census is being conducted and its exact results will be known in 1992/93. Depending on the fertility and mortality assumptions adopted, population is projected to rise to between 713,211 and 678,050 by 1997. As in most developing countries, the proportion of the population under 15 is high: at 40%. As these age groups enter the reproductive period, the growth rate of population is likely to rise above the current 2.5%, 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. The population is distributed in the following areas:

a) The virtually empty northern region; (b) The relatively well settled area in the inner Himalayan valleys; (c) The more thinly populated area south of the Black Mountain Range and associated high-

lands; (d) The densely populated southern area.

Most Bhutanese still live in villages in an extended family system or maintain strong links with their rural families. The average size of the households 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 Gaylephug, Phuntsholing and Samdrup Jongkhar. All of these three cities are at the border between India and Bhutan. Towns are developing in all the 18 Dzongkhags (district) headquarters.

Employment and Incomes

Although significant economic progress has taken place since the 1960s, the majority of the population remain dependent on agriculture for incomes and employment. There is no landlessness in Bhutan, although the rapidly growing population could lead to the emergence of marginal farmers. As most rural settlements are far from markets there has been little potential for the sale of surplus production of crops and livestock, although this is beginning to change with the opening of the more inaccessible areas through the construction of roads. The types of crops produced varies considerably, depending on climate and access to markets. Staple crops include rice, maize, potatoes, buckwheat, barley and wheat. Livestock are an extremely im-

portant part of the farming system, and kept for draught purposes, milk products and meat. Production of horticultural crops is 20% in edible oils in 1988. Employment in the other sectors of the economy continues to be insignificant, as industrial development has been limited. The Government has been responsible for the establishment of several productive enterprises, however the private sector is being encouraged to take over these activities. Unlike many other developing countries, unemployment is not yet a concern.

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 Dungkhangs. 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 service consist of telephone, telegraph, telex and civil wireless. However only the civil wireless service connects all Dzongkhag headquarters in the country. International telephone links are available by satellite from Thimphu.

Sports

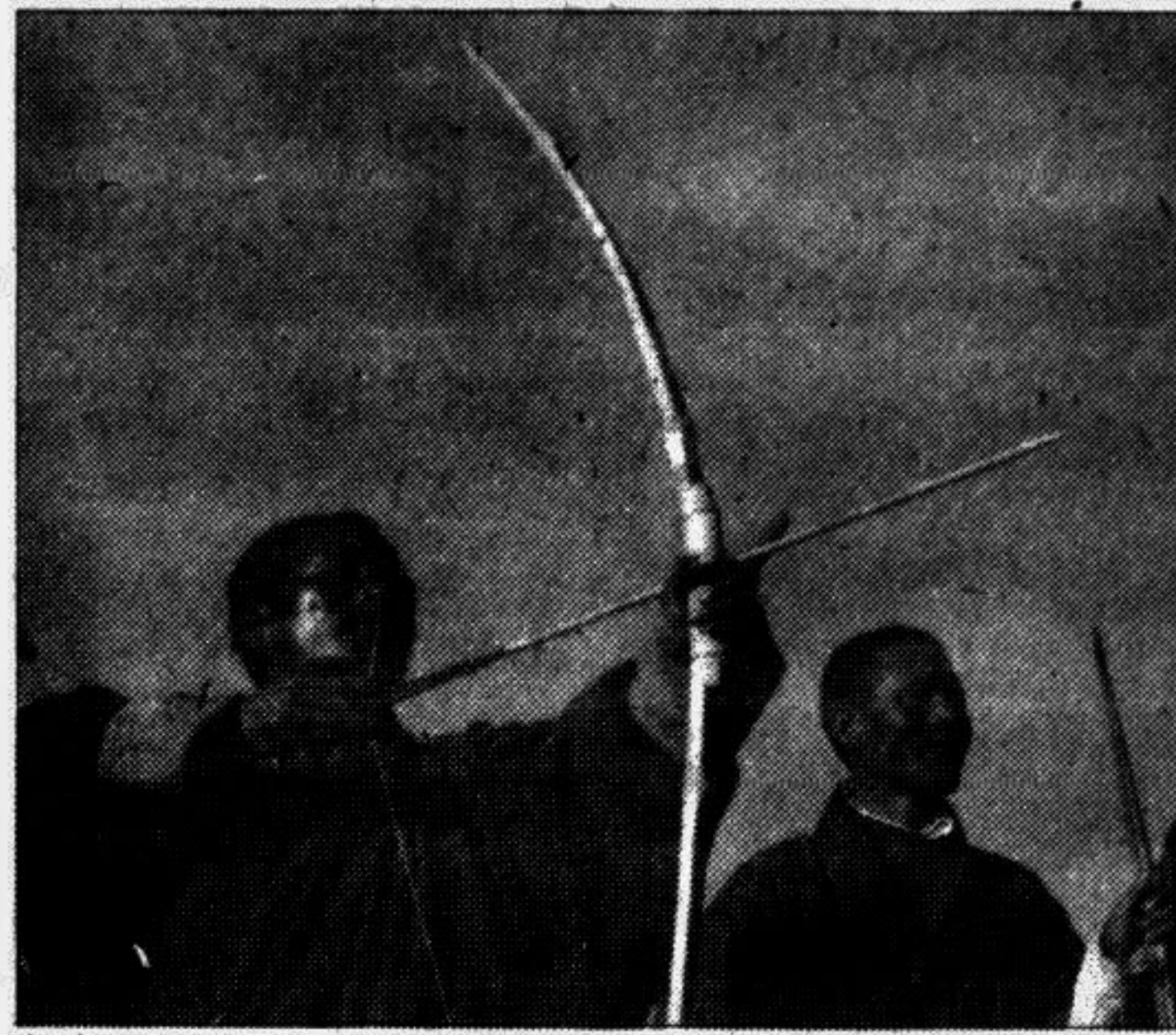
Archery is the much-loved national sport of Bhutan. Each village has its own archery range, and it is impossible to imagine any festival taking place without a high-spirited competition. Contests take place year round. Targets are made of wood splashed with colourful patterns, the arrows steel-tipped.

Many Bhutanese men are skillful archers. The general confidence in their aim is shown by the number of people who stroll unconcerned near the targets during matches — a sight likely to unnerve the visitor.

Other traditional sports include degor, in which a round, flat stone is thrown at a target, keshey (wrestling) and pung-do

(shotput). In soksom a spear, held at either end, is thrown at a target; in khuru the projectile is small and dart-like, with a

The organizations of central government consist of seven Ministries, their related Departments, 4 Commissions, the



Archery, favourite pastime of the Bhutanese

sharp nail at one end and feathers at the other. In sherey parey, a contest of strength, one man grasps the wrist of his opponent, who must free himself in order to win.

Among the legacies of Bhutan's early contact with the British in India is soccer, a sport which is avidly pursued, with the King himself an avid enthusiast. Basketball, volleyball, golf, badminton, tennis, table tennis and horse racing are other popular imports.

Institutional and Legal Framework

An enlightened monarch rules Bhutan through Lhengyen shuntshog (Cabinet), Tshogdu (National Assembly) and the civil service. His majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuk (born 11 November 1955), IVth in Wangchuk Dynasty, is the Head of the Government as well as the State.

The Tshogdu (National Assembly) has 150 members of which 105 are Chimmis (representatives of the people) elected for a term of three years. The monk bodies elect 12 monastic representatives, while the remaining 33 members are representatives of the Government and are nominated by the King. The Tshogdu sits twice a year, in addition to emergency sessions. A Royal Advisory Council also exists to advise the King and the Ministers, consisting of 9 Councillors. Four Councillors are elected as representatives of the people, 2 Councillors are elected as representatives of Monk Bodies and one Councillor is nominated by the King.

The Gups assist the Dzongkhags and Dungsas in collection of taxes, mobilization of labour for community services and public construction, settlement of disputes and many other local activities including implementation of some development programmes.

Five Dzongkhags in Eastern Bhutan, namely Tashigang, Samdrup Jongkhar, Mongar, Pema Gatsel and Lhuntsi are grouped under Zone IV which is headed by the Zonal Administrator, based in Yongphula. The Zonal Administration has sec-

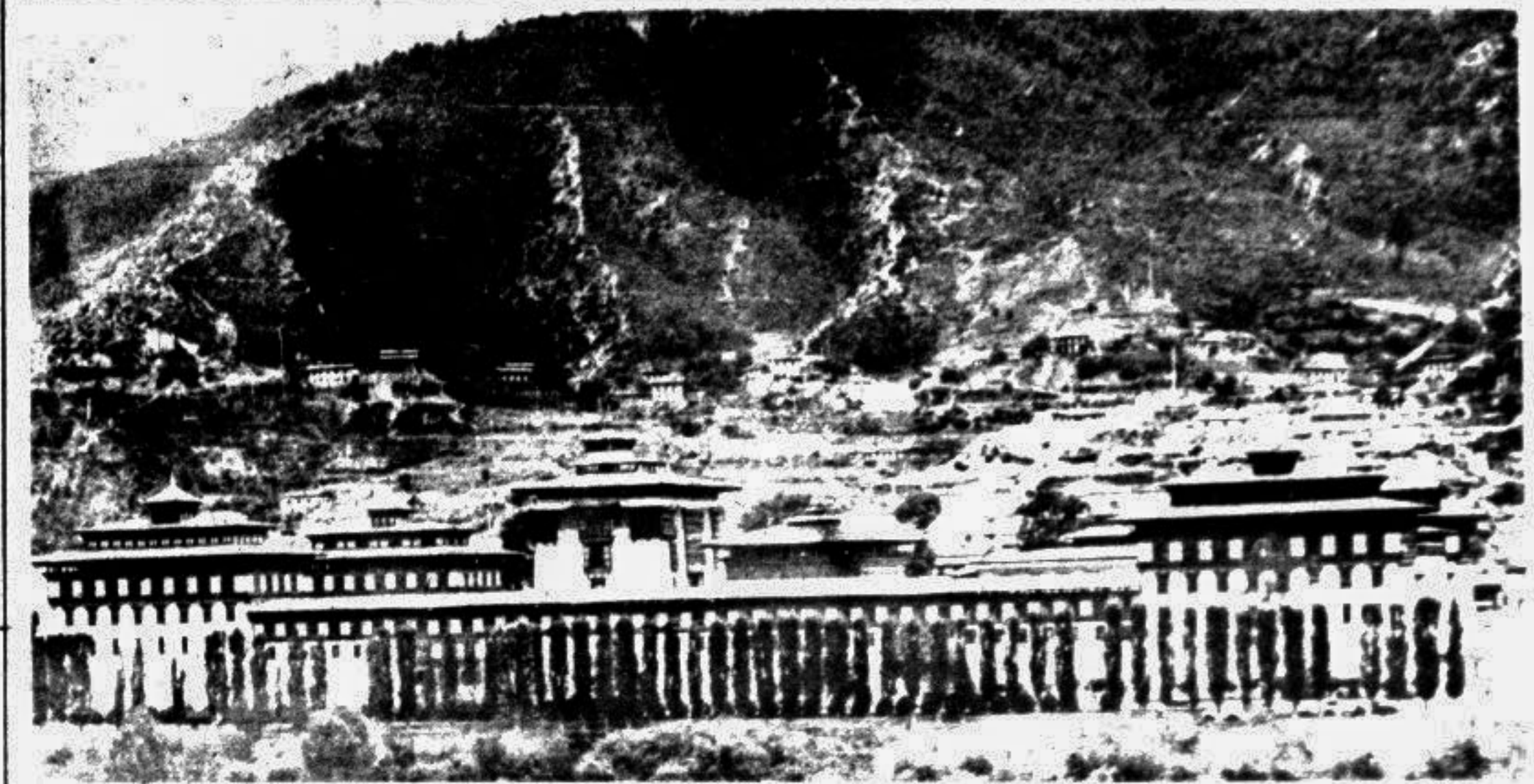
toral officers who coordinate, plan, and monitor the activities in the zone. The Zonal Administration was established to enhance the process of decentralization, begun in 1981.

Bhutan's legal system was previously based on codes laid down by spiritual rulers in the 17th century. The present laws as they exist in Thrimshung Chenmo (Supreme Laws) were legislated by the Tshogdu (National Assembly) in 1957 under the aegis of His Late Majesty Jigme Dorji Wangchuk (1928-1971), the Third King.

The Calendar

The Bhutanese calendar is based on the Tibetan, which in turn derives from the Chinese lunar system. In the seventeenth century, the scholar Pema Karpo introduced into Bhutan a new method for computing the days of the week. From this a number of differences from the Tibetan model have arisen. The method of accounting for a leap year differs, for example, and auspicious periods during the year are not always the same.

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DAYS	ORIG	DEST	FLT	NBR	DEP	ARR
SAT	PARO	DHAKA	KB	109	1530	1630
SAT	DHAKA	BANGKOK	KB	109	1715	2045
WED	BANGKOK	DHAKA	KB	110	1000	1140
WED	DHAKA	PARO	KB	110	1225	1325

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