



National Day of BHUTAN



The Kingdom of Bhutan Celebrates 93rd National Day

THE 17th of December is of special significance to every Bhutanese. This was the day in the year 1907 when the people of Bhutan elected Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck, a great and noble statesman, as their first hereditary monarch. By uniting the country and establishing a central authority, he brought peace and stability and laid the foundation for lasting peace in Bhutan. Since then, the Kingdom has enjoyed unprecedented peace, progress and stability. His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck is the fourth hereditary monarch of Bhutan.

It found itself in a unique position to frame its development policies based upon the experiences of other countries and to avoid the pitfalls of the modernization process by adopting sound policies. On the other hand, as a late starter, Bhutan had to face formidable challenges mainly in the establishment of education, health, communications and other infrastructural facilities. Fortunately, Bhutan has made commendable progress in its development and has accomplished in a few decades what would have normally taken over hundreds of years.

"The responsibility of running the country fell upon His Majesty at the young age of 16 when his late father King Jigme Dorji Wangchuck passed away in 1972. In spite of his tender age, His Majesty the King showed remarkable maturity and leadership and let the nation through a path of peace and prosperity.

His Majesty the King spent many years traveling throughout the Kingdom and meeting the people. He posed many questions and encouraged the people to express their opinions so that he could understand their aspirations. Based on the people's aspirations, appropriate policies and plans were framed for the country. To begin with, His Majesty placed emphasis on the establishment of education, health, environment, agriculture and other infrastructural facilities. At the same time he promoted people's participation through the decentralization process. The needs of the people were incorporated into the development plans based on three factors, namely (i) felt needs, (ii) available resources and (iii) priority or choice. The people were enabled to elect their representatives on the Dzongkhag Yargay Tshogchhung (District Development Committee), and the Geog Yargay Tshogchhung (Block Development Committee) upon the personal initiative of His Majesty.

Amidst vehement opposition from the entire membership of the National Assembly in July 1998, His Majesty the King devolved full executive powers to an elected Council of Ministers. At the same time, His Majesty offered to make himself accountable to the National Assembly by giving it the confidence if it felt that he had failed to govern to the satisfaction of the people and to serve the best interests of the country.

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His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck

MESSAGE

Today is the day of great significance for all Bhutanese. The Kingdom of Bhutan celebrates its 93rd National Day throughout its land with befitting programmes. His Majesty the King along with the members of the Royal Family makes it a point to celebrate each year with the citizens in far-flung places. This year His Majesty is celebrating the National Day with the people of Trashigang, which is located in the far east of the Kingdom. On this very happy and auspicious occasion, it gives me a great pleasure to greet the warm and hospitable people of Bangladesh. It is also my pleasant duty to convey to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the friendly people of "Sonar Bangla" the warm greeting and good wishes of the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan.

It is indeed a matter of great pride that the celebration of our National Day invariably coincides with the holy month of Ramadan, when every citizen of this beautiful host country, Bangladesh is engaged in noble religious practices. This month offers us a wonderful opportunity to purify our body, speech and mind. This is a month of

caring and sharing with the deprived lot, our fellow human beings who may not be as privileged as those of us. On this holy occasion, I on behalf of the Royal Government and the people of Bhutan and on my own behalf express our solidarity with the Government and people of Bangladesh and convey our warmest greetings.

On this very happy occasion, I would like to share with you a phrase "GROSS NATIONAL HAPPINESS" coined by His Majesty in King. We have come to believe that "Gross National Product" cannot sustain if it is not based on "Gross National Happiness". Today, Bhutan's development policies are based on this noble philosophy.

What do we human beings seek most in life? Knowingly or unknowingly we all seek "Happiness". Where do we find happiness? Do we find it in the material well-being? How do we look for happiness? Happiness is very much within us, but it remains ever elusive because we look for it in wrong places. We are fortunate to be born as human beings. We are even more fortunate to be born with all functioning faculties. Let us not waste them through wrong use. For lay people like us, it is

my conviction that we can achieve lasting happiness through working for other people's happiness.

May Bhutan-Bangladesh friendship grow from strength to strength. May our two peoples join hands with peoples of the rest of our region and use their collective wisdom towards achieving peace and harmony in South Asia and beyond. Tashi Delek.



Lhatu Wangchuk, Ambassador of Bhutan to Bangladesh



Bhutan at a Glance

- Area : 46,500 square kilometers
- Position : Approximately between 26°45' and 28°10' north latitude and 88° 45' and 91°10' east longitude.
- Population : 658,000 (1999 projected figures)
- Capital : Thimphu
- State Religion : Mahayana Buddhism
- Languages : Dzongkha, English, Sharchop, Nepali and number of dialects.
- Per capita GDP : US \$645 (1998 figures)
- Unit of Currency : Ngultrum (at par with Indian Rupee)
- Seasons : Spring: March to May
Summer: June to August
Autumn: September to November
Winter: December to February
- Head of State : His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck
- Head of the Government : H E Lyonpo Yeshey Zimba, Chairman, Council of Ministers
- Parliament : National Assembly (Tshogdu)
- National Sport : Archery
- National Animal : Takin (Budorcas taxicolor)
- National Bird : Raven (Corvus corax)
- National Flower : Blue Poppy (Meconopsis grandis)

Bhutan-Bangladesh Friendship

DURING his State Visit to Dhaka in 1984, His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck said, "What can be a better basis for friendship and goodwill between the two nations than their support for each other in times of traumatic struggle for self preservation?"

Bhutan has always attached special importance to its friendship with Bangladesh. Ever since Bangladesh's emergence as an independent nation, the friendship between the two neighbours has been deepening steadily based on mutual trust and respect, goodwill and un-

derstanding bound by the common hopes and aspirations of our two peoples.

Bhutan was one of the first countries to recognize independent Bangladesh in 1971. Formal diplomatic relations between the two countries was established in 1973 and resident missions set up in 1980 in each other's capitals. His Majesty paid State Visits to Bangladesh in 1973 and 1984. He also visited Dhaka during the first SAARC Summit in 1985 and the Seventh SAARC Summit in 1993.

A number of visits were also made to Bhutan from Bangladesh. President Mohammed Ershad visited Bhutan, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia visited Bhutan in 1994 in her capacity as the Chairperson of SAARC.

Cooperation between Bangladesh and Bhutan has been increasing steadily over the years with a good number of Bangladeshi nationals visiting Bhutan for business and tourism purposes. This year a 48-member delegation from the Federation of the Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) led by its President visited Bhutan in a bid to further improve trade relations between the two countries. A group of eminent journalists also visited Bhutan this year during the period when Bhutan's National Assembly was in session.

Since 1980, Bhutan has been sending students to

Economic and Trade Relations

THE Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation was signed in 1984 under which the two countries agreed to promote a programme of development cooperation consisting of exchange of expert missions for cooperation projects and provide training facilities in institutions.

The Air Service Agreement between the two countries was signed in 1986. Druk Air (Royal Bhutan Airlines) held its first inaugural flight to Dhaka on 30th October 1986 and scheduled flights commenced a week later. Though air services to Dhaka are not commercially viable, regular flights are being maintained as a gesture of political goodwill.

The trade Agreement was signed in 1980 wherein the two countries agreed to take all necessary measures to promote bilateral trade. The trade agreement also made provisions for according to each other the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment in respect of customs formalities, duties and other taxes levied on exports and imports of goods. Pursuant to the signing of the trade agreement on December 27, 1983, Bhutan and India signed a trade agreement to facilitate Bhutan's trade with other countries. On the same day, Bangladesh and India signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate movement of goods between Bhutan and Bangladesh. This arrangement was vital as Bhutan and Bangladesh do not have common borders.

The Protocol to the Trade Agreement was signed on 5th February 1984. The signing of the Protocol to the Trade Agreement was a milestone in

Bhutan-Bangladesh bilateral relations although actual trade between the two countries did not materialize immediately mainly due to the non-viability of trade routes. The 1987 trade talks witnessed the inclusion of a new transit route for Bhutan-Bangladesh trade through Chaingrauh (India) / Birinari (Bangladesh). Trade between Bhutan and Bangladesh commenced in 1988.

Bhutan's exports to Bangladesh consist mainly of apples, oranges, processed fruits, jams, juices, pickles, minerals (limestone, coal, dolomite, etc), stones and boulders. Major imports from Bangladesh consist of readymade garments, jute carpets, pharmaceutical products, ceramic and melamine products, auto spares and other manufactured goods.

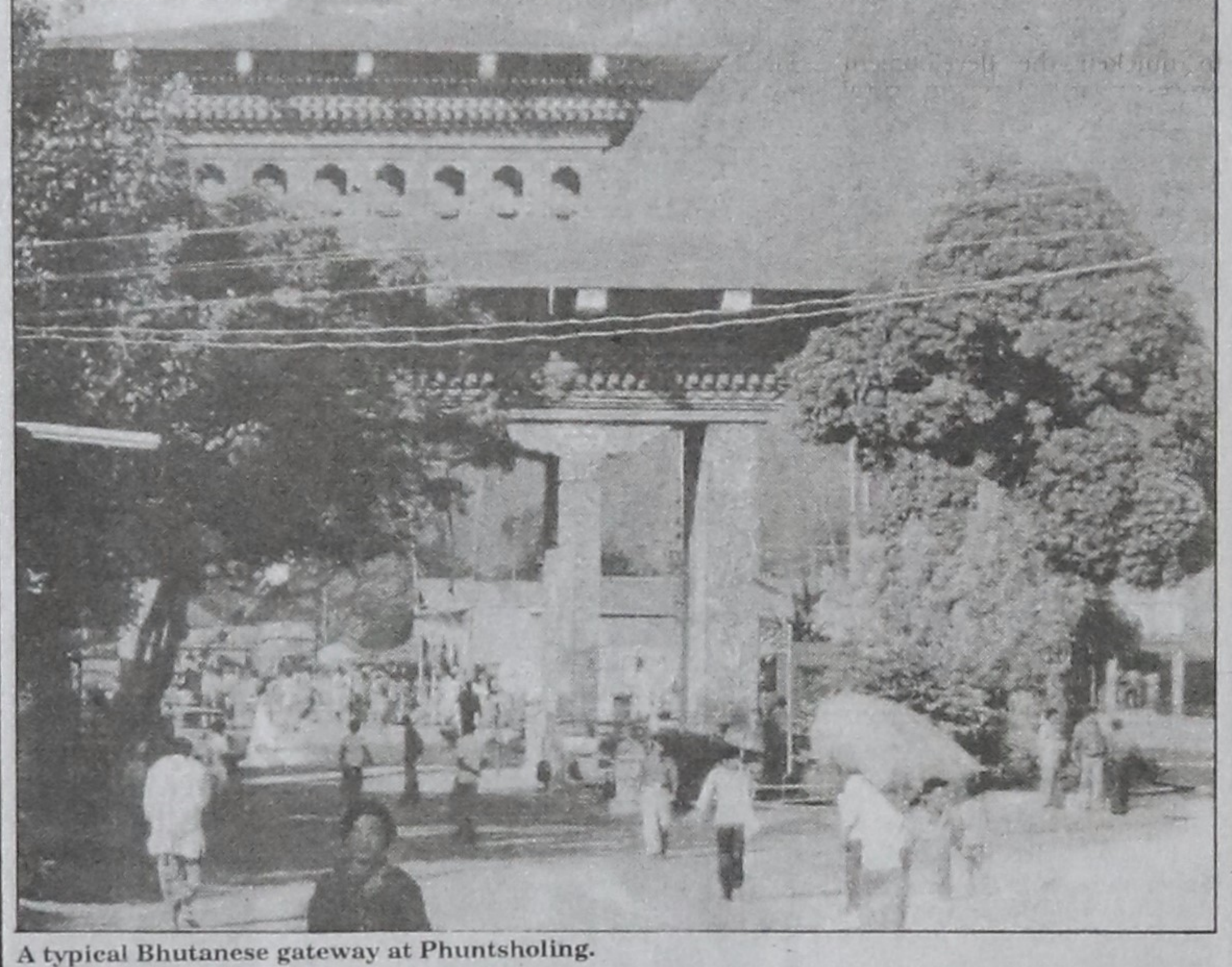
Conscious of the fact that the trade balance is skewed in favour of Bhutan, Bhutan has taken many steps to increase imports from Bangladesh. Eleven Import Companies were established in Bhutan with the specific mandate to import exclusively from Bangladesh. Several trade fairs have been held in Bhutan solely to promote Bangladeshi products. Many trade delegations from Bhutan visited Bangladesh to identify products that have a potential market in Bhutan. As a result, the number of Bhutanese businessmen and traders coming to Bangladesh has increased dramatically over the past several years.

Admittedly, one of the reasons for the trade gap is due to Bhutan's small population and market. Therefore, Bangladeshi exporters and manufacturers

have not been very interested in making serious and consistent efforts to promote their goods in Bhutan. What Bangladesh must recognize is that Bhutan's market is growing rapidly as the purchasing power of the Bhutanese increases at a phenomenal rate. The per-capita income of the Bhutanese people is expected to rise dramatically within the next few years. This expectation is fueled by the country's sound economic policies and investment in large eco-friendly projects such as hydroelectric power projects.

Bhutan continues to grant duty free access to all products originating from Bangladesh in efforts to increase imports from Bangladesh. Bhutan-Bangladesh relations were further consolidated when Bhutan's Foreign Minister, He Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley paid a goodwill visit to Bangladesh early this year at the invitation of the Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. HE Mr Abdus Samad Azad. During the official talks, Lyonpo Jigme Thinley said that there was a tremendous amount of goodwill between the peoples of Bhutan and Bangladesh. He added that goodwill alone would not be able to sustain relations if it is not translated into tangible cooperation.

This was followed by the visit of Bhutan's Foreign Secretary, DASHO UYEN TSHERING, who led an official Trade Delegation to Dhaka, Bangladesh from 29 August to 1 September, 2000. During the official trade talks held on 30 August 2000, the two sides agreed to renew the Trade and Transit Agreement for a further period of three years.



A typical Bhutanese gateway at Phuntsholing.

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Warmest Felicitations on the occasion of the National Day of Bhutan

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