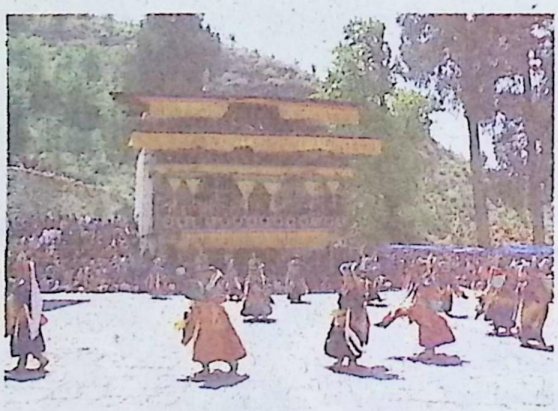
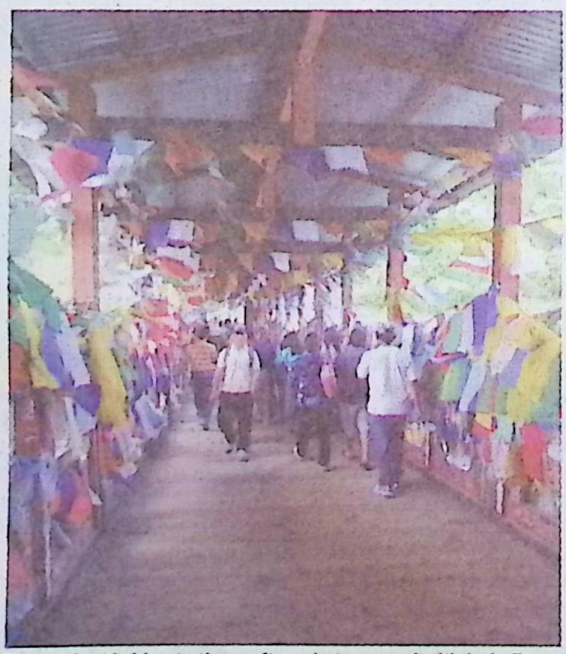
The ornate, extravagant decorations and the huge palaces with courtyards symbolise this site. The main secretariat building houses the main government departments, all the Ministries, the National Assembly Hall, the office of the King and the Throne Room and summer headquarters of the Central Monastic Body. It is also the summer residence of the monk body and the religious chief Je Khempo.

In the assembly hall there is a two storied high golden statue of the Buddha. The temples and monasteries are full of superb wall paintings depicting many Buddhist deities and 12 stages of Buddhahood. The two largest *thankas*, life-sized drawing of the Buddha, are housed in the Uchi, the tall citadel-type temple in the middle of the two courtyards. These holy *thankas* are displayed to public only once in 25 years.



Tshechu Festival

Grand gala festivals are arranged in the courtyards and are locally called Tshechu. The three-day-long festivals consist of lots of mask dances. The appropriate time to enjoy the festival is during the month of October when autumn brings a wind of divinity in Bhutan. A tip to remember: Neither headdress nor even an open umbrella is allowed in the premises.



The ancient bridge to the craft market covered with holy flags.
PHOTO: MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

The clean city streets of the Thimphu valley are also a spectacle to behold. While strolling around the streets on Sunday, one can also get the chance to explore the weekend market of Thimphu beside the Wang Chu. The entrance to the market is marked by an old tower and an antique wooden bridge covered by lucky flags to keep away evil spirits.

There are two parts in the market--one is for regular products and one is for the handicrafts, where we can discover the real Bhutan. All the marvels of the inaccessible parts of this wonderful country are gathered here for a charming bargain. The glittering handmade silk shawls, scarves, embroideries, lacquer wares, exquisite stone works and metal works are there to please the artistic taste of the customers. The silk works from the east, the incense from the south, the woollen crafts from the north and all the wonders of Himalayas can be found here. Just opposite the craft market lies a special market where fresh vegetables, fruit and crops from the south are being sold there to savour the Bhutanese recipe.

Bhutanese cuisine is famous for its spices. Chilli cheese curries (Ema Datshi), spicy buckwheat noodle (puta) with piquant Bhutanese pickle are very famous for their unique flavour and taste. Even normal Bhutanese dishes contain the fragrance of secret Himalayan spices which is very appetising. Bhutanese people used to drink butter tea locally called Tsuja which is very savoury and make digestion quicker and easier.

Anyone visiting Thimpu must see the stupa honouring the late King Jigme Dorji Wangchuk, the national handicraft emporium, Simply Bhutan- an exquisite and rich gallery for feeling the culture, Simkota Dzong, which is a 16th century monastery-fort.

Outside Thimphu we went to visit the Druk Wangyel Lhakhang temple at the Dochula. There is a Royal throne for the King and a prestigious seat for the high priest. The wall of the temple is covered with stunning tapestries depicting the Kings, the Buddhist saints and the stories from the Purana. Beside the main temple there is an exquisite memorial built by the Queen Mother of Bhutan to commemorate the victory over the ULFA and the Assamese Bodo rebels. The memorial consists of 108 stupas. The wall surrounding the stupas is fitted with Buddhist prayer wheels called La Khor.