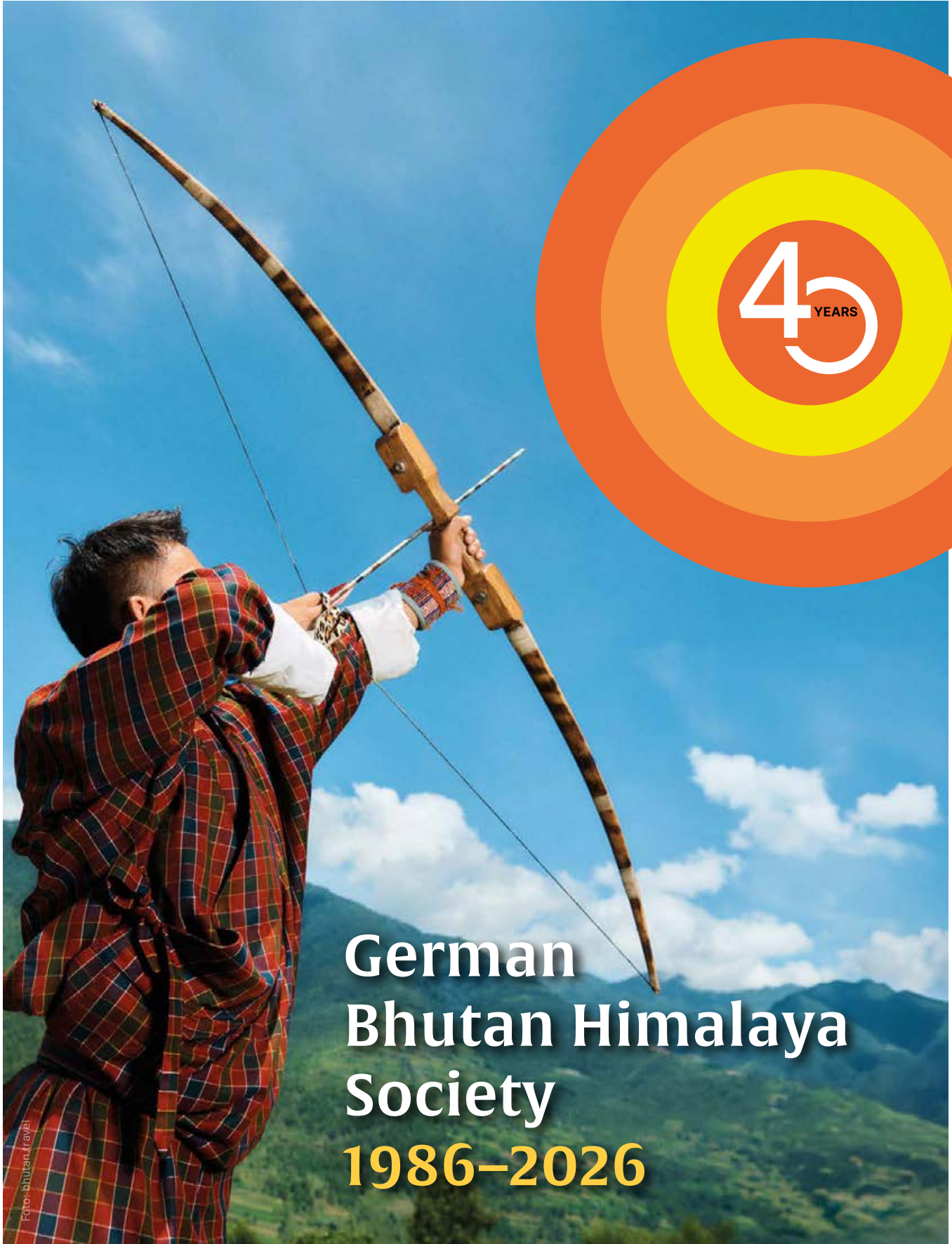


# Thunlam



German Bhutan Himalaya Society | News & Reports from the Kingdom of Bhutan



German  
Bhutan Himalaya  
Society  
1986–2026

Foto: bhutan travel

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Photo: privat



*Dear friends of Bhutan,*

*In this edition of Thunlam, we take a look at the most important events in Bhutan in 2025.*

*First, we look at the activities and supported projects of the German Bhutan Himalaya Society (DBHG). On 17 May 2025, we held our annual conference, the Bhutan Day, at the beautiful Dharma Mati Centre in Berlin.*

*Another highlight was the participation of several DBHG members in a delegation trip organised by European Bhutan societies. The route led from Thimphu via Gelephu to remote regions such as Buli in the Zhemgang district and back to the heart of the kingdom. It was a journey full of encounters, contrasts and inspiration.*

*At the beginning of the trip, as part of the 'Bhutan 2030 – Safe Water for Every Child in Bhutan' project, we were able to present a symbolic cheque of 21,000 euros. This support was made possible by the generous donation from the International Water Aid Organisation e. V. (IWAO). These funds will enable five more schools in Bhutan to be equipped with SkyHydrant water filters.*

*In addition, this Thunlam offers you many current stories on politics, economics, agriculture, culture and tourism.*

***Our next Bhutan Day will take place on Saturday, 30 May 2026, at the Gustav Stresemann Institute in Bonn. In the evening, we feel very honoured that the Lord Mayor of Bonn has invited us to a reception in the Old Town Hall.***

*In 2026, we will be looking back on 40 years of the German Bhutan Himalaya Society e.V. This will be one of the topics of this Bhutan Day, with interesting presentations. An invitation to Bhutan Day and the general meeting is available online on our website. We would be delighted to welcome you to this special event in Bonn.*

*With kind regards on behalf of the board / Tashi Delek*

*Reinhard Wolf  
President; German Bhutan Himalaya Society*

# Bhutan Day 2025 at the Dharma Mati Centre in Berlin

(rw) The theme of Bhutan Day was 'Agriculture in Bhutan – Towards a Sustainable Future', highlighting Bhutan's agricultural transformation.



Photo: Sven Kaun-Feederle

**Tshoki Choden**, Ambassador of the Royal Bhutanese Embassy in Brussels, emphasised in her speech the importance of Bhutanese development principles and the growing global interest in Bhutanese approaches to sustainability and cultural continuity.

**Younten Phuntsho**, Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, who participated in the event online from Bhutan, delivered the keynote address, outlining current national strategies to improve food security and the resilience of Bhutan's agricultural sector.

Other speakers included:

**Dr Sonam Tashi**, Dean, College of Natural Resources (CNR), Royal University of Bhutan, who spoke about the role of agro-industrial linkages in shaping a sustainable future.

**Prof. Dr. Christian Lippert** (University of Hohenheim) and **Dr. Tsho Tsho** (CNR), who discussed the complex process of transitioning to organic farming in Bhutan.

**Prof. Dr. Arndt Feuerbacher** (University of Hohenheim) analysed policy measures for managing conflicts between humans and wildlife and their impact on biodiversity-friendly land use.

**Dr. Andreas von Heßberg** gave a presentation on climate change and vegetation dynamics in the Himalayan region.

Participants noted that the event not only served as a platform for knowledge exchange, but also facilitated meaningful networking among experts – an exchange that could benefit Bhutan in future collaborations. The Dharma Mati Centre provided a fitting setting for the discussions. Organisers and guests alike praised the team's exceptional hospitality.

The event was enriched by the presence of numerous Bhutanese students currently studying in Germany and the Netherlands. Bhutan Day 2025 marked another successful edition of this long-standing DBHG initiative. The society is preparing to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2026 and to further strengthen interpersonal relations between Bhutan and Germany. ■

# 50 years of development in Bhutan – on the road to the future

Excerpt from an essay by Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Manfred Gerner, Honorary President of DBHG e. V., which is yet to be published.

*The development of Bhutan from an outsider's perspective.*



Photos: Manfred Gerner

Since 1974, Bhutan has modernised at a pace that took other countries centuries to achieve. The author, who visited the country almost fifty times between 1974 and 2025, describes this transformation as a unique combination of tradition, spirituality and targeted development. Bhutan – the ‘Land of the Thunder Dragon’ between India and China – is culturally influenced by Tantric Mahayana Buddhism and politically guided by the guiding principle of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which is to be understood as ‘contentment’ rather than happiness.



The Bhutanese are considered friendly, respectful, nature-loving and peaceful. Despite profound changes, these core values have remained intact. While large parts of the country were still living in pre-modern structures in 1974, Bhutan had to make the leap into a globally networked world – from analogue ways of life to digitalisation and artificial intelligence.

## Social and economic change

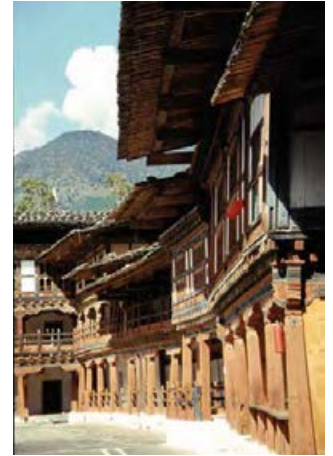
In 1974, per capita income was around USD 100; by 2024, it had risen to over USD 4,200. Life expectancy rose from 31 to around 70 years during the same period – arguably the clearest indicator of progress. The healthcare system also developed rapidly: from a few clinics to a nationwide network of over 60 hospitals, around 200 health stations and comprehensive care.



## Education and communication

Whereas school education used to be reserved almost exclusively for monasteries, today almost all children attend school. Illiteracy is considered to have been overcome. Over a quarter of the population is in education or training. At the same time, the media and communications landscape has grown: from a small weekly newspaper to digital daily media, from courier services to the internet, television, mobile communications and satellite communications.

Photos: Manfred Gerner



### Mobility and infrastructure

In 1960, there were no motorable roads; in 1974, there were only about 1,200 kilometres. Today, Bhutan has around 20,000 kilometres of roads and hundreds of bridges. The number of vehicles has risen from a few hundred to over 126,000. With the founding of the national airline Drukair in 1983, Bhutan became accessible internationally; there are now connections as far as to Dubai.

### Conclusion

In 50 years, Bhutan has made an extraordinary leap forward in its development without abandoning its cultural identity. Its success is based on the symbiosis of Buddhism, GNH and responsible governance. With projects such as the ‘Gelephu Mindfulness City’, Bhutan is positioning itself as a small but forward-looking state – a model for a changing world. ■



### Everyday life and rural life

In 1974, 97% of the population lived in rural areas. Everyday life was characterised by hard farm work, self-sufficiency, bartering and religious rituals. Traditional houses made of wood, clay and bamboo were built through communal labour and spiritual guidance. Despite modern influences, this close connection between religion, nature and community has been preserved in many places.



## In Memoriam Hartwig Steiner



Photo: privat

Shortly after his 85th birthday, our long-standing member Hartwig Steiner passed away. As the DBHG, we owe him a debt of gratitude, particularly for his publications, including the first flyers and roll-ups that we used for many years at our annual Bhutan Days. The ‘perpetual calendar’ he designed with pictures from Bhutan was also a very special work. We will honour Mr. Steiner's memory.

# Delegation trip by the European Bhutan Friendship Associations

*(skf) A journey through a Bhutan in transition*

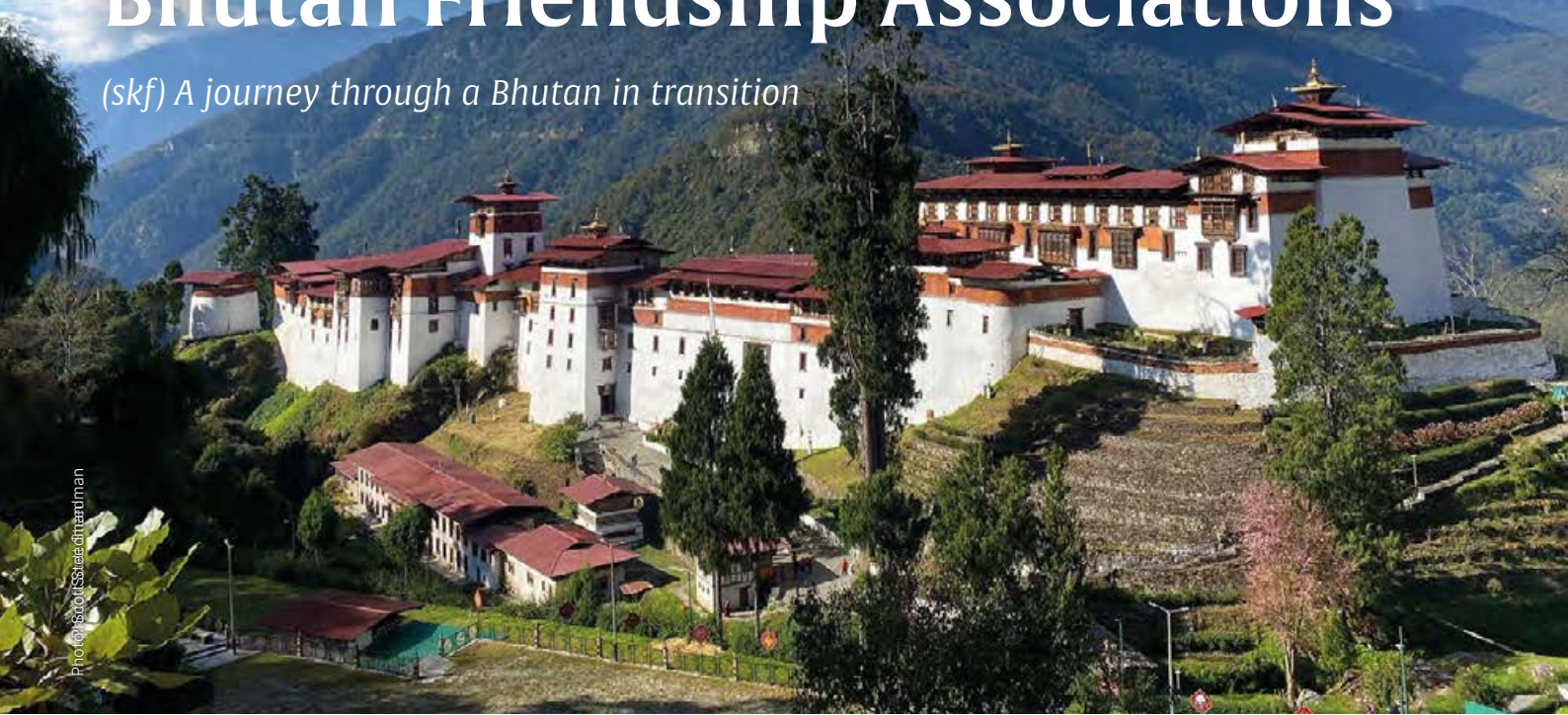


Photo: © Satoru Sasagawa/amanaman

Six years after the last joint delegation trip, the European Bhutan Friendship Association (EBFA) tour took us back to Bhutan in November and December 2025. The aim of this trip was to listen, learn and gain a deeper understanding of the rapid social, economic and societal developments in the country and their significance for Bhutan's future.

Our route took us from Thimphu via Gelephu to remote regions such as Buli in the district of Zhemgang and back again to the heart of the kingdom. It was a journey full of encounters, contrasts and inspiration, and an impressive confirmation of how consistently Bhutan is charting its own course between tradition and the future.



Photo: Sven Kaun-Feederle

## Clean water – concrete help with sustainable impact

A particularly moving start to our trip was the meeting with Dr Lam Dorji and Karma Gyaltsen from the Rotary Club of Thimphu. As board members of the German Bhutan Himalaya Society, we were able to present a symbolic cheque of €21,000 as part of the 'Bhutan 2030 – Safe Water for Every Child in Bhutan' project. This support was made possible by a generous donation from the International Water Aid Organisation (IWAO). In addition to the systems already donated by the DBHG, five more schools in Bhutan can now be equipped with SkyHydrant water filters. Each system delivers up to 10,000 litres of clean drinking water per day – without the need for electricity or chemicals. Clean water means fewer illnesses, less absenteeism and better educational opportunities. This is

a simple but effective example of how international partnerships can secure the future in concrete terms.

Photo: Sven Kaun-Feederle



### **Gelephu Mindfulness City – Vision of a different kind of progress**

A key focus of the trip was a visit to Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) in southern Bhutan. This ambitious project symbolises Bhutan's attempt to combine economic openness, sustainability and mindfulness. The master plan was designed by the architectural firm

BIG – Bjarke Ingels Group. In discussions with Dorji Yanki, architect and vice-governor of GMC, and Dr Lotay Tshering, former prime minister and current governor, it became clear how openly, clearly and responsibly this mega-project is being driven forward. GMC is set to become a place that facilitates international exchange while remaining deeply rooted in Bhutanese values – a model that is attracting worldwide attention.

### **Regions that inspire courage.**

Beyond the grand visions, our journey also took us to rural and structurally weak regions. In Buli, a remote village in the district of Zhemgang, we met people who live in difficult conditions but are nevertheless shaping their future with great courage. Issues such as migration, infrastructure deficiencies and human-wildlife conflicts shape everyday life. At the same time, ecotourism, sustainable agriculture, coffee cultivation and traditional crafts are creating new prospects. Visits to cooperatives, schools and social initiatives made it clear that development in Bhutan is not an abstract concept, but rather a living community effort.



Photo: www.mf.gov.bt



appointment – it was extremely inspiring and will remain in our memories for a long time to come.

### **Our thanks go to the organising team.**

This journey, with its depth, intensity and openness, would not have been possible without exceptional organisation. Our heartfelt thanks go to the organising team, who planned this trip with great care, experience and personal commitment: Claudio Zingg and Marianne Frei (Society Switzerland–Bhutan), Françoise Pommaret (Amis du Bhoutan / France), Christine Jantscher (Friends of Bhutan Austria) and Reinhard Wolf (DBHG). Their joint efforts made possible a journey that went far beyond a classic visit programme – towards genuine exchange, deep understanding and new bonds.

### **Entrepreneurial spirit and responsibility**

In Phobjikha, we witnessed impressive examples of young entrepreneurs taking responsibility. Whether at Khemdro Dairy or the Gogona Milk Processing Unit, these businesses are creating high-quality products, regional value and social feedback all at once. Profits flow back to the farmers, and international partnerships strengthen local structures. These projects show how entrepreneurship and the common good go hand in hand in Bhutan.

### **High-level meetings**

A highlight of the trip was the personal audience with His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. In calm, clear words, he spoke about the future of Bhutan, the further development of gross national happiness and his vision for Gelephu Mindfulness City as a bridge between South Asia and Southeast Asia. This encounter was much more than an official

### **Outlook**

We return with many impressions, questions and ideas – and with the feeling that Bhutan has once again shown us that progress can also be quiet, mindful and people-centred. An attitude from which we can learn a great deal. ■



# EU and Bhutan celebrate 40 years of partnership and friendship

(rw) Source: Business Bhutan

*The EU and Bhutan have reached a significant milestone, celebrating four decades of partnership and friendship in Thimphu on 16 October 2025.*



Photo: Czech Embassy New Delhi

**T**he European Union (EU) and Bhutan have reached a significant milestone, celebrating four decades of partnership and friendship with a grand reception in Thimphu on 16 October 2025. The event, co-hosted by the EU, the Netherlands and the Kingdom of Denmark, was attended by the Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay and senior officials, underscoring the strength and longevity of their alliance. 2025 also marked the 40th anniversary of bilateral relations between Bhutan and Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden.

## EU remains a reliable partner for Bhutan

The celebrations coincided with the arrival of the largest high-level EU delegation ever to visit Bhutan. The 19 EU ambassadors from 20 EU Member States were received by Hervé Delphin, EU Ambassador to India and Bhutan, from 15 to 17 October. The 40-year relationship between the European Union and Bhutan is

characterised by an exemplary partnership based on mutual respect and trust.

The Prime Minister thanked the EU for supporting Bhutan on its journey out of the group of least developed countries. During their visit, the delegation met with the King, ministers, representatives of civil society and private sector. The focus was on climate protection, green energy, disaster preparedness and regional connectivity.

## Multi-annual programme (2021–2027) with a budget of €48 million

The visit demonstrates the EU's continued commitment to Bhutan's development priorities. The programme (2021–2027) provides €48 million. Other projects focus on tourism, civil society and the private sector. The EU and Bhutan intend to continue their cooperation, for example through the EU-Bhutan Business Forums.

As Bhutan continues on its path towards sustainable development and modernisation, its partnership with the European Union remains a cornerstone of its strategy for inclusive growth and regional stability, marking 40 years of fruitful cooperation and promising future collaboration.

## Partnership in the field of renewable natural resources

The EU and Bhutan have been cooperating in the field of renewable natural resources since 1982. Relations were formalised in 1985. Since then, the relationship has developed into a comprehensive partnership. The EU has been supporting Bhutan in sustainable development and modernisation for decades. ■



## First EU Bhutan Business Forum

(rw) Source: [international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/eu-bhutan-business-forum\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/eu-bhutan-business-forum_en)

**A**t the first EU-Bhutan Business Forum in Brussels, Frankfurt and Prague in January 2026, European and Bhutanese business representatives exchanged views on gross national happiness, green infrastructure and sustainable growth.

Bhutan offers political stability, strong economic momentum and a strategic gateway to north-east India – ideal conditions for European companies with growth targets in South Asia. The forum strengthens cooperation, puts key sectors in the spotlight and deepens relations between the EU and Bhutan.

### Bhutan as a strategic growth partner for Europe

Special highlight: Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay gave an inspiring speech on 10 good reasons to invest in Bhutan, followed by contributions from State Secretary Karin Müller (Hesse) and Stefan Lock (European Commission).

The European Investment Bank (EIB) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Government of Bhutan on forestry, bioeconomy and nature-based, climate-neutral solutions. With up to €150 million for water and solar energy and further support – for example for SMEs and ecotourism – the EIB is helping Bhutan to turn ambitious ideas into viable projects. DBHG participated in the forums with several representatives. ■



## Special award for pioneer PRIMAVERA and Bhutan

(rw) Source: German Sustainability Award; 3 December 2025

**T**he 8th German Sustainability Award honoured the collaboration between German aromatherapy pioneer PRIMAVERA and the Kingdom of Bhutan with a special prize. The award was presented on 5 December 2025 in Düsseldorf. Princess Dechen Yangzom Wangchuck and PRIMAVERA founders Ute Leube and Kurt Nübling accepted the award.

### Pioneering work for sustainable development

The cooperation began in 1990 with the first visit to Bhutan by the founders of PRIMAVERA, who wanted to extract high-quality lemongrass oil there. This led to a partnership based on trust, respect and shared values. Since 1990, PRIMAVERA has been working with the local company 'Bio Bhutan' – distilling wild lemongrass in eastern Bhutan and setting up a factory for high-quality soaps.

Today, PRIMAVERA works with more than 165 Bhutanese farming families through its subsidiary Terra Himalaya. Together, they promote knowledge transfer, research, manufacturing development and rural value creation.

Bhutan is considered the world's first carbon-neutral country and pursues ambitious environmental goals. PRIMAVERA has been supporting this vision since 1990 with concrete projects and joint development work. ■

# Bhutan celebrates the 70th birthday of its fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck

(rw) Sources: Business Bhutan, KUENSEL, BBS in November 2025

*A monarch who combined courage, compassion and foresight – and whose vision continues to shape Bhutan today as a country that seeks to harmonise progress, happiness and nature.*



Photo: Daily Bhutan

The fourth king's 70th birthday was celebrated as a national and international event of great historical, cultural and spiritual significance. The celebrations were not only a tribute to him personally, but also a recognition of his lasting legacy for Bhutan. Ceremonies, cultural programmes and spiritual rituals took place throughout the country, culminating in the Global Peace Prayer Festival in Thimphu and the birthday on 11 November 2025. Tens of thousands of people, including international guests such as the Prime Minister of India, took part in the celebrations. Sacred relics of Buddha were displayed for veneration, and numerous community activities strengthened the sense of national unity and gratitude.

## **A king's legacy: happiness, democracy, sustainability**

The fourth king is described as the architect of Gross National Happiness, with which he redefined deve-

lopment: the focus should be not only on economic growth, but also on well-being, cultural identity and environmental sustainability. During his 34-year reign, he gently led Bhutan into the modern age, improved infrastructure, strengthened education and healthcare, and consolidated state institutions. At the same time, he focused on decentralisation and paved the way for democracy by later voluntarily abdicating – an extraordinary step in modern history.

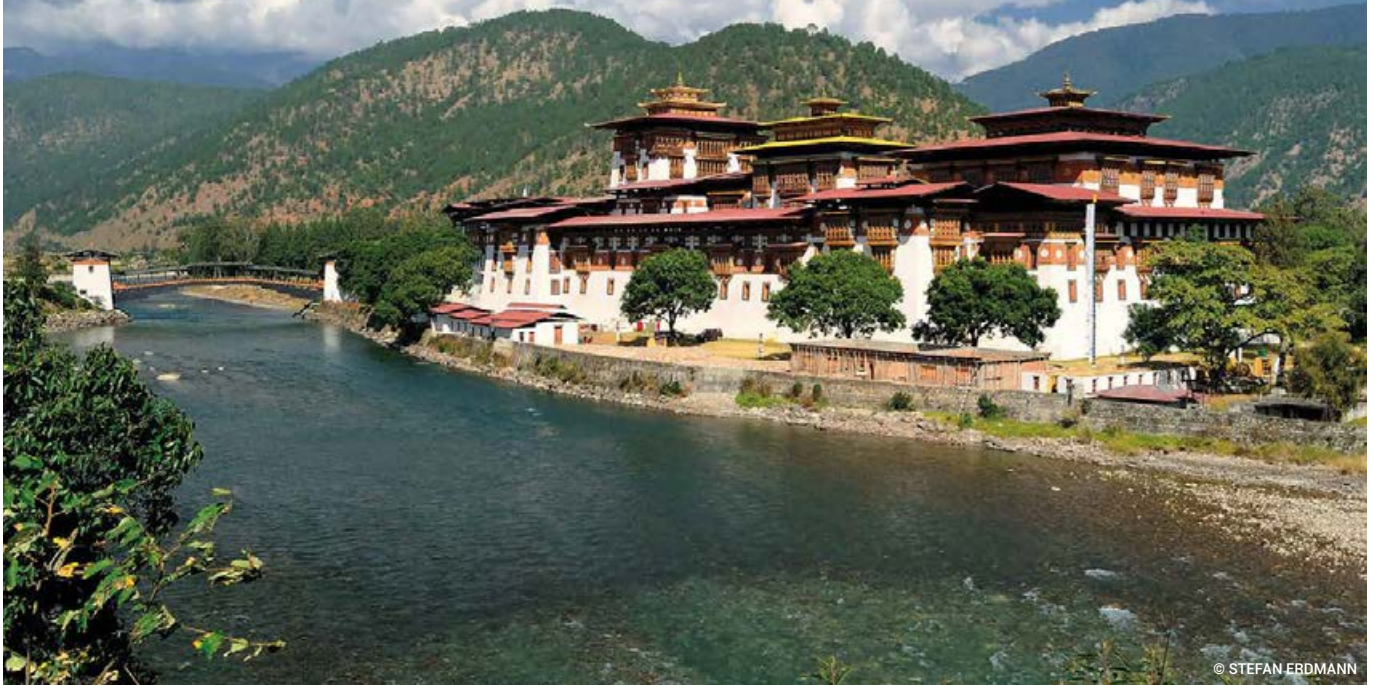
## **Protecting nature as a public duty**

His commitment to environmental protection and nature conservation is also particularly noteworthy. Early on, he established protected areas, enshrined high forest cover in the constitution and made Bhutan one of the few carbon-neutral countries in the world. International awards confirm this commitment. ■



Photo: Daily Bhutan

# BHUTAN



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## *Königreich im Himalaya*

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Wir kennen das Land seit über 40 Jahren durch intensive Reisen mit engen Kontakten zu den örtlichen Veranstaltern, den Fluglinien und zum Königshaus. Individuelle Reiseprogramme mit täglicher Anreise aus Nepal, Indien, Thailand und neuerdings Dubai. Private Trekkingtouren und Festival-Offerten wie zum Punakha- und Paro-Festival.

Eine begeisternde DVD von dem bekannten Filmemacher Stefan Erdman und „*Das Land des Glücks im Himalaya*“ senden wir Ihnen gegen eine Schutzgebühr von 20 Eur inklusive Versandkosten gerne zu.

**GERNE SENDEN WIR IHNEN AKTUELLE INFORMATIONEN ÜBER BHUTAN**

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# A king's promise: protector of his people, architect of Bhutan's future

(rw) Source: Business Bhutan, 24 December 2025

About the speech by King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck on 17 December 2025

Every word of His Majesty's National Day speech carries weight, but at its core is a powerful statement of responsibility: a king who speaks not as a distant architect of progress, but as a protector of his people and steward of Bhutan's future.

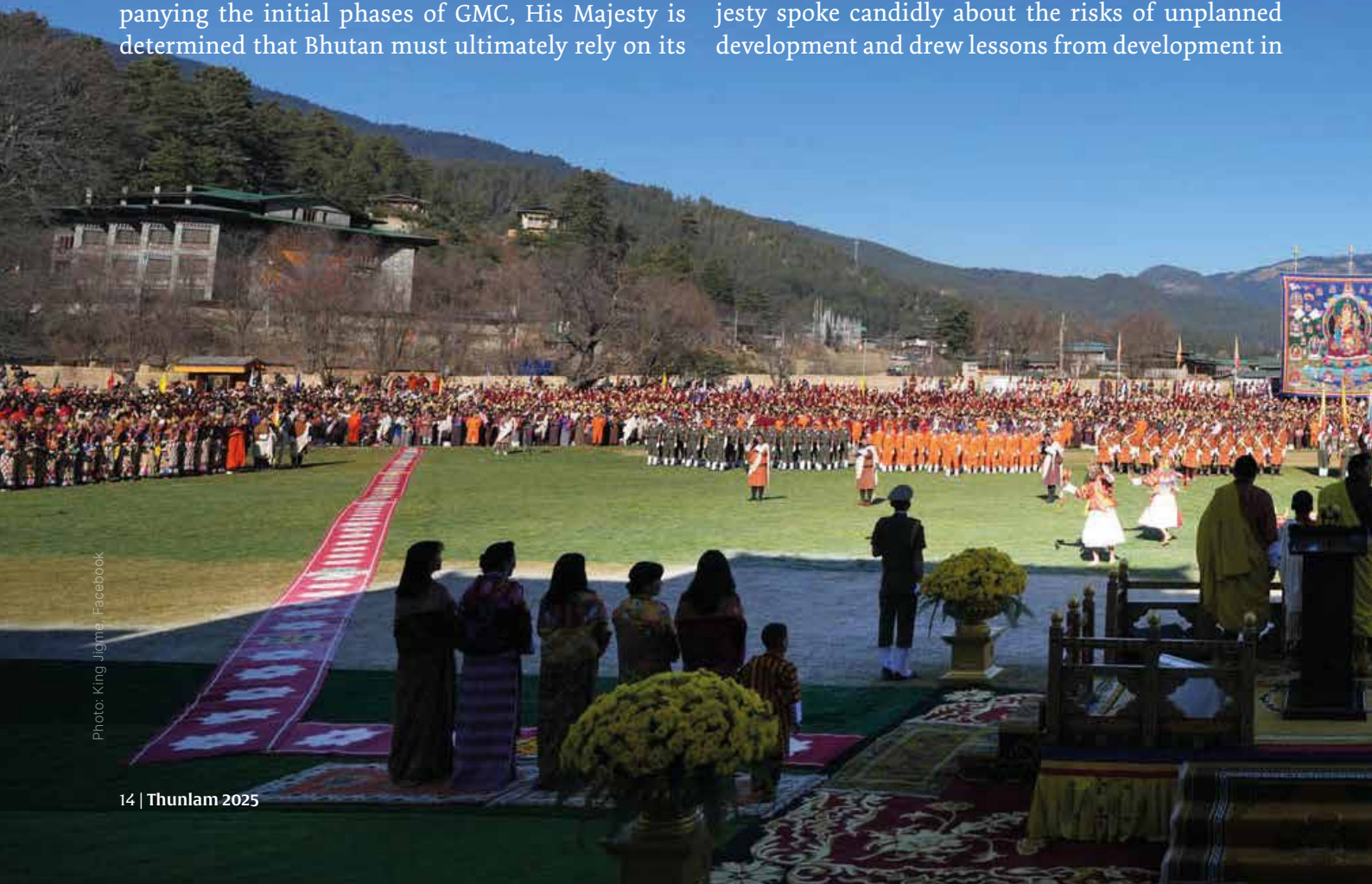
## Focus on Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC)

From the outset of his speech, His Majesty made one truth abundantly clear: Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) is not about concrete or glass, but about Bhutan, its people, its values and future generations. A central theme was His Majesty's trust in the Bhutanese youth. While international experts are accompanying the initial phases of GMC, His Majesty is determined that Bhutan must ultimately rely on its

own population. Programmes such as Pelsung (translated: guardians of prosperity), launched as part of GMC, are not symbolic, but conscious investments in the future leadership of the country. By selecting the best young Bhutanese to work with international experts, His Majesty is preparing Bhutan's next generation. This is a king who not only hopes for the future, but actively prepares his people to shape it.

## Risks of unplanned developments

Perhaps the deepest concern expressed in the address was about land management, an issue that affects livelihoods, dignity and social peace. His Majesty spoke candidly about the risks of unplanned development and drew lessons from development in



Thimphu and Paro. Much of the land within GMC belongs to rural families, many of whom received it as Kidu (a charitable fund that has helped thousands of Bhutanese) from His Majesty, the Fourth King. Protecting this land is not only an economic matter, but also a moral responsibility.

### **GMC structured as a company, landowners retain shares**

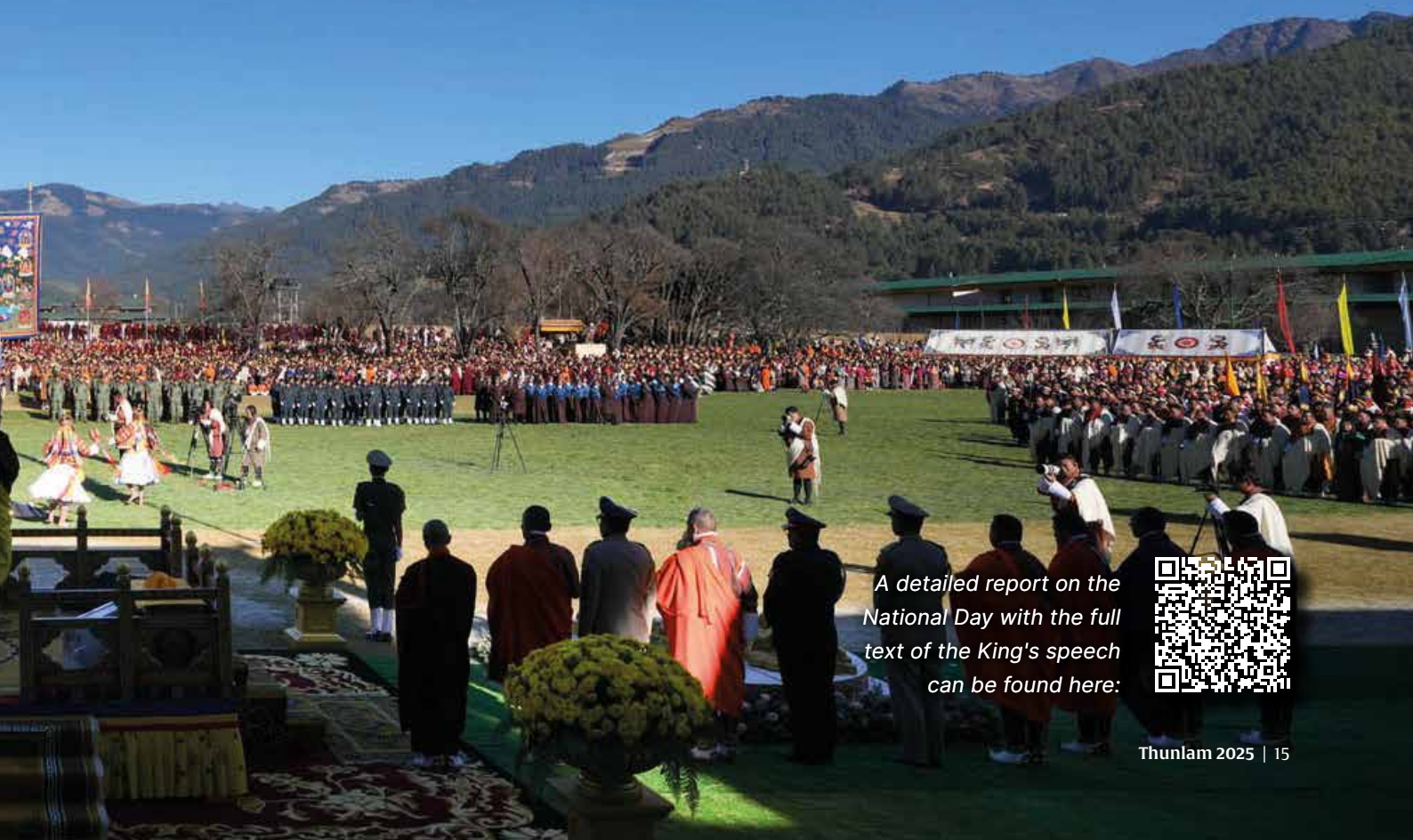
To ensure fairness, GMC is structured as a company whose shares are directly linked to land owner-

ship. Landowners retain their shares (6 per cent), while the remaining 94 per cent of state-owned land is divided among all 205 gewogs (districts). In this way, every Bhutanese, whether a landowner or not, becomes a stakeholder in the future of the country. What makes GMC so extraordinary is not its size, but its purpose. His Majesty has a vision of the world's first Buddhist city, not just for Bhutan, but as a gift to the world. It will be a city where integrity, compassion, mindfulness and meaning stand alongside productivity and profit. His Majesty's confidence in this endeavour is not based on wealth or size, but on unity. Bhutan's harmony, common purpose and spiritual foundation are the forces that enable a small nation to move mountains.

As the speech drew to a close, one thing stood out above all else: His Majesty's unwavering trust in the Bhutanese people. GMC is not just a national project, but a shared vow between the King and his people to build a stronger, fairer and more resilient Bhutan together. With GMC, His Majesty is not only shaping a future of prosperity, but also protecting the soul of Bhutan and ensuring that the nation can confidently engage with the world without ever losing its identity. ■



Photo: PMO's Office Facebook



*A detailed report on the National Day with the full text of the King's speech can be found here:*



# State of the Nation Address

(rw) Source: Prime Minister's Office, Thimphu

On 3 July 2025, Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay presented the State of the Nation Report.

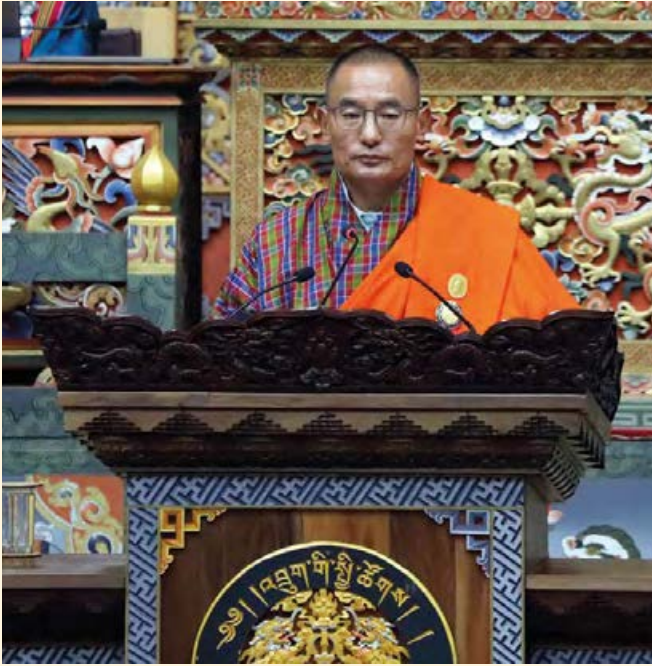
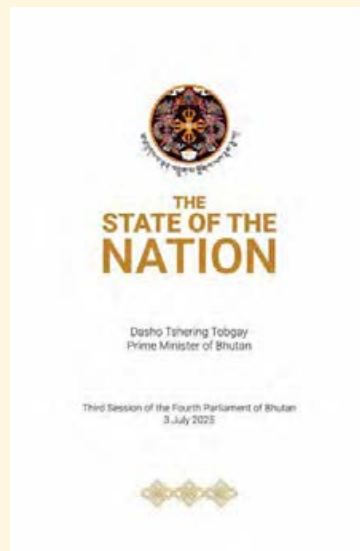


Photo: Bhutan Times

The report highlights the country's current situation, key challenges, strategies for addressing these challenges, the government's annual plans and priorities, and upcoming legislative initiatives. The Prime Minister expressed concern about the increasing exodus of Bhutan's working-age population seeking employment abroad and emphasised that strengthening the economy was one of the country's top priorities.

The opposition criticised the report as superficial and strategically unclear. Although it mentions GDP growth and higher life expectancy, it neglects inequality, urban-rural gaps and regional disparities. Among other things, youth unemployment and emigration abroad are criticised.

Grafik: www.pmo.gov.bt



## About the content of the report (excerpt):

*Key strategies for tackling the country's challenges:*

1. Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) – His Majesty's vision, established as a special administrative zone with a focus on sustainability, spirituality and economy.
2. 13th Five-Year Plan (FYP) – With a record budget of Nu. 512 billion (approx. € 5 billion) and the goal of doubling GDP.
3. Bhutan 21st Century Economic Roadmap ('10X Vision')
  - Focus on energy, agriculture, tourism, digital economy
  - Goal: High-income country by 2050.

*Government plans and priorities for 2025–2026:*

- Economic growth: Real growth 8.3%; inflation 2.82%.
- Investments in infrastructure, agriculture, energy (e.g. 3,000+ MW capacity), industrial parks and tourism.
- Loans and support for businesses, agriculture, workforce training and start-up funding. Creation of 12,000 new jobs.
- Education & health: Construction of a 450-bed specialty hospital; modernisation of schools.
- Digital services: introduction of digital ID, expansion of fibre optic
- Social reforms: measures against drug abuse, support for families with more children, expansion of traditional medicine.
- Environment & energy: expansion of renewable energy (11,000 MW target), participation in the CO<sub>2</sub> trading system.
- Foreign policy: New diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Lesotho, and planned relations with Qatar, Malaysia, Philippines. ■

# Ambitious plans, structural breaks

Dr. Uwe Dräger writes about this chapter

**I**n 2019, I travelled to Bhutan for the first time to help set up a microfinance institution. Since then, I have been working and living in Thimphu on a regular basis, which has given me the opportunity to follow economic and employment issues at first hand. Below is my personal opinion, summarising the contributions selected for 2025.

## Between vision and reality

In recent years, Bhutan has presented an impressive array of economic policy strategies, roadmaps and visions. From the industrial development roadmap and ambitious employment targets to the '21st Century Economic Roadmap' and the vision of the 'Gelephu Mindfulness City' (GMC), the political will to shape the future is unmistakable. However, it is precisely this abundance of announcements that obscures a deeper problem: the structural weaknesses of the Bhutanese economy persist – and they are becoming increasingly noticeable.

## Productivity as a blind spot in development

The question of productivity is central here. Despite decades of growth, this continues to be based primarily on capital investment rather than efficiency gains. Total factor productivity is stagnating and capital is being tied up without generating corresponding added value. Even the supposedly robust energy sector is showing signs of this imbalance: hydropower remains the backbone of the energy supply, but it is neither immune to macroeconomic inertia nor suitable for creating broad-based employment.

## Private sector in the shadow of the state

Added to this is a private sector that is formally touted as an engine of growth, but in reality is heavily dependent on the state. Bureaucratic obstacles, high financing costs, a restrictive credit system and a lack of incentives for innovation are slowing down entrepreneurial dynamism. Many new programmes repeat familiar goals such as diversification, value creation, job creation and exportability without consistently addressing institutional bottlenecks.

## The labour market is under pressure – is it a source of hope or a burden?

The consequences are most evident in the labour market. Despite ambitious employment targets, young, well-educated Bhutanese continue to migrate abroad. For many, migration is no longer a transitional strategy, but a conscious life choice. Whether and to what extent these people will return remains to be seen. For a small country with a small population, this is more than a demographic problem – it is an economic burden.

Large-scale projects such as GMC undoubtedly inspire hope and can provide impetus. However, the decisive factor will be whether it is possible to go beyond visionary narratives and create sustainable and productive jobs that inspire confidence and open up new prospects. As long as efficiency, institutional reforms and private responsibility lag behind the announcements, the impression prevails that Bhutan thinks in major keys but continues to live in minor keys economically. ■



## 17 MW Sephu solar project commences operation, second phase planned

(ud) Source: BBS, 19 July 2025

The first phase of Bhutan's largest solar project in the Wangdue district has been commissioned with a capacity of over 17 MW. A second phase with an additional 5 MW is scheduled to follow in September. The aim is to meet domestic energy demand and reduce electricity imports during the winter months. The plant covers 44 acres and is expected to reduce electricity imports by around 25 million units. Bhutan continues to rely on electricity from India during the dry season and imported almost one billion units of electricity worth around 3.4 billion ngultrum (approx. 34 million euros) last year.

The project is part of the government's goal to generate a total of 5,000 MW of energy from solar and wind power by 2040. Further solar projects are already planned, including Jamji, Apa Ama Pang and a project in Bumthang. The project is being financed by the Asian Development Bank with around 1.5 billion ngultrum (approx. 15 million euros), partly as a loan and partly as a grant. ■



## Bhutan's claim to high-income country status depends on efficiency gains

(ud) Source: Bhutan Today, 31 October 2025

Bhutan has left its status as a least developed country behind and is striving to become a high-income country. The key factor here is total factor productivity (TFP), which measures how effectively labour and capital are used. According to Dr Pema Dorji from the Bhutanese Ministry of Finance, Bhutan's TFP is stagnating and ranks at the bottom of the regional comparison.

Growth since the 1990s has been based primarily on rising investment rather than efficiency gains. While capital expenditure grew by 9.5% annually, total production rose by only 6.2%. Bhutan therefore needs around four units of investment to generate one unit of production – a warning sign of poor returns on capital.

Hydropower remains the most important source of income, but cannot compensate for the economic weaknesses of other sectors. Inefficiencies also arise in tourism due to overcapacity. Similar patterns can be seen in consumer behaviour.

### Structural brakes: capital intensity, regulation and lack of diversification

Dr Pema cites the highly regulated financial sector as another problem. High interest rates and a lack of credit ratings make it difficult for private investors to access financing. The private sector is heavily dependent on government support, while sustainable growth requires more personal responsibility and innovation.

International examples show that productivity gains are possible through diversification, digitalisation and export promotion. Without efficiency gains, Bhutan faces rising investment costs, higher public debt and greater vulnerability to external shocks. ■

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## Bhutan's economic roadmap for the 21st century officially launched – goal: tenfold increase in GDP

(ud) Source: BBS, 4 June 2025



Graphic: www.pmo.gov.bt

**W**ith its '21st Century Economic Roadmap', Bhutan is pursuing the goal of increasing its gross domestic product tenfold by 2050. GDP is expected to rise from 185 billion ngultrum (approx. 1.85 billion euros) in 2023 to 1,850 billion (approx. 18.5 billion euros), which requires annual growth of at least 10%. The goal is to achieve the status of a developed country with a diversified economy by 2034.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay emphasised that Bhutan must leverage the success of hydropower to create new opportunities in technology, AI, IT and digital services. Five growth sectors are to be developed: digital economy, wellness, education services, advanced manufacturing and sustainable mining.

Plans include expanding electricity capacity to 25,000 MW, promoting renewable energies and further developing high-quality tourism offerings. At the same time, the legal framework is to be modernised, investment facilitated and training programmes expanded. A special implementation unit will coordinate the strategy. ■

# Ministry sets target: 65,000 new industrial jobs by 2035

(ud) Source: The Bhutanese, 23 August 2025

The Ministry of Industry, Trade and Employment (MoICE) has set a national target of creating a total of 65,000 new industrial jobs by 2035.

This goal is part of the Industrial Development Ecosystem, which defines seven priority areas and several national targets for promoting industrial growth.

At the same time, the aim is to ensure that 40 per cent of new jobs are filled by young people, women and workers from rural areas. By 2032, vocational training and qualification programmes are to be fully aligned with foreseeable industrial needs. In addition, MoICE aims to improve the transition from school to the labour market and reduce youth unemployment.

## Value-added and resilient industrial economy

The goal is a diversified, value-added and resilient industry. The focus is on greater independence from hydropower and a shock-resistant industrial ecosystem. The share of manufacturing is to increase from eight to twelve per cent (up four percentage points) and the contribution of the industrial economy to GDP from 53 to 60 per cent (up seven percentage points).

The private sector is to create at least 70 per cent of new industrial jobs. In addition, 300 million ngultrum (approx. three million euros) in foreign direct investment is to be mobilised.

## Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are to be strengthened.

Another priority is the revitalisation of CSMI (Cottage, Small and Medium Industries) as a driver of local value creation. The proportion of licensed

CSMI is to rise from 41 to 70 per cent. In addition, 50 per cent of CSMI are to be given access to affordable credit, development services and sustainable sales markets. CSMI are also to be more closely linked to the tourism, agriculture and public procurement sectors in order to strengthen their competitiveness and value chains.

## Establishing and promoting balanced industrial development

MoICE aims to achieve spatially balanced development: 50 per cent of new industrial settlements are to be located outside the Thimphu and Chukha regions. Regional clusters are to be established in dzongkhags with little industrial presence, and production and employment in rural areas are to be strengthened.

In addition, exports are to be doubled by 2035 and strategic import substitution is to be promoted, for example in food, furniture and building materials, in order to reduce the trade deficit and foreign exchange pressure.

There are also plans to expand competitive infrastructure: three new industrial parks with modern supply and logistics structures are to be built. In addition, the National Single Window, dry ports and multimodal trade hubs are to be commissioned in order to reduce transaction costs. In addition, links between industry, agriculture, tourism and the education and TVET system are to be strengthened in order to promote innovation and competitiveness.

# Bhutan aims to create over 15,000 jobs in the renewable energy sector by 2035

(ud) Source: Business Bhutan, 16 August 2025

The Industrial Development Roadmap aims to create over 15,000 jobs in the renewable energy sector by 2035. At the same time, the sector is expected to contribute to a 12% increase in GDP and achieve a capacity of 10,000 MW of hydropower and 3,000 MW of solar energy.

## Renewable energies as a job engine and growth driver

The strategy identifies ten high-growth sectors, including agribusiness, IT, wellness, tourism and renewable energies. Challenges include regulatory barriers, high investment costs, limited financing and a shortage of skilled workers. There are also climate risks and competitive pressure.

The government plans regulatory reforms, infrastructure expansion, technology introduction and financial incentives to diversify the energy mix. Private investment has been opened up, including foreign investment. ■



Photo: Unsplash

# Vision for a Gelephu Mindfulness City

(ud) Source: Bhutan Today, 2025



Photo: GMC, Facebook

Architect Bjarke Ingels presented his vision of Gelephu Mindfulness City as a sustainable special administrative region that combines economic growth, cultural identity and environmental protection. The city is intended to create jobs and reduce the exodus of young talent.

## Sustainable city of the future between growth and gross national happiness

The city, which is powered entirely by hydropower, encompasses economic clusters such as wellness, technology, finance, aviation and logistics. An international airport, transport networks and extensive infrastructure are planned, while 60% of the area is to be designated as a nature reserve.

The architecture combines traditional Bhutanese elements with modern technology. Public spaces, cultural institutions and a Buddhist centre are intended to strengthen community and identity. A planned temple dam will combine energy production with cultural significance. The goal is a city that combines economic development with sustainability and gross national happiness. ■

# Bhutan is growing – but who will stay to build it?

(ud) Source: *Bhutan Times*, 7 July 2025

*Prime Minister expresses concern in State of the Nation address*



Photo: National Assembly of Bhutan

**W**hen presenting the second State of the Nation Report to Parliament on 3 July, Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay emphasised accelerated economic growth, the challenge of emigration and the strategic roadmap for 2025–2026.

‘Bhutan’s GDP has risen from 249 billion ngultrum (approx. €2.49 billion) in 2023 to 273 billion (approx. €2.73 billion) in 2024 – a growth of 9.6 per cent,’ he explained. Further growth of around 8.3 per cent is expected in the coming years.

## Young Bhutanese abroad – economic burden

Despite the positive figures, the Prime Minister warned against emigration: over 65,000 Bhutanese – around 8.5 per cent of the population – live abroad, mainly young, well-educated people. For a small developing country, this loss of skilled labour is a serious threat to independence and economic development.

As countermeasures, he cited investments of 512 billion ngultrum (approx. €5.12 billion) in the 13th Five-

Year Plan, the implementation of the 21st Century Economic Roadmap and the development of Gelephu Mindfulness City. Six priority sectors – energy, agriculture, the digital economy, tourism, education and health – are to form the basis for future growth.

The 1,020 MW Punatsangchhu II project marked a milestone in the energy sector. The Economic Stimulus Programme provided 3.5 billion ngultrum (approx. €35 million) to support businesses. Loan deferrals, venture capital for start-ups, an Economic Development Board to attract foreign investment and a special committee to implement the Economic Roadmap are also planned.

## Implementation as the key

The Prime Minister emphasised that these initiatives are key steps towards realising the royal vision of a prosperous, independent Bhutan.

Social indicators have improved: life expectancy is 70 years and the literacy rate among young people is 99 per cent. Educational reforms, infrastructure investments and the nationwide ‘One Egg per Child per Day’ nutrition programme are strengthening health and equal opportunities.

Tourism is also recovering, supported by international branding and improved service quality. At the same time, the government is pushing ahead with reforms in tax, energy, mining and consumer protection laws to bring the legal framework into line with economic realities.

In conclusion, Prime Minister Tobgay reaffirmed Bhutan’s focus on gross national happiness and called for national unity in the face of global uncertainties – combined with an appeal to Bhutanese living abroad to return to help build the country. ■

# RUHIG MIT HANGLAGE

Das Tigernestkloster in Bhutan.  
Himalaya-Reisen: [www.diamir.de](http://www.diamir.de)



## DHI launches 10x roadmap in line with the vision of Gelephu Mindfulness City

(ud) Source: *The Bhutanese*, 16 August 2025



Photo: The Bhutanese

The state investment company DHI presented its 10x roadmap. It has five investment priorities: energy, manufacturing, mining, infrastructure and global securities. The strategy is closely linked to the development of Gelephu Mindfulness City. Mindfulness is to be integrated into education, work culture and governance.

By 2035, DHI aims to achieve a turnover of 700 billion ngultrum (approx. 7 billion euros) and establish a Bhutan Future Fund. The roadmap is intended to strengthen DHI as Bhutan's central economic engine and significantly expand innovation, investment and value creation. ■

The latest news from Bhutan on agriculture focuses on transforming the agricultural and food system, expanding climate-friendly and organic farming, and building value chains for smallholder farmers, supported by major international partners.

Several new strategies and multi-billion Ngultrum projects launched for the period 2025–2026 focus on climate resilience, exports, and youth- and women-led agribusinesses. However, despite all the great efforts of international aid organisations such as the World Bank, IFAD, JICA, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and, last but not least, the Bhutanese government, the income from the sale of agricultural products is insufficient. Farmers are leaving their farms and the land is lying fallow.

## Bhutan aims to be self-sufficient in food by 2029

(ih) Source: BBS, 16 February 2025



Photo: Tarayana Foundation

Bhutan aims to achieve greater food self-sufficiency by 2029, primarily through increased rice and vegetable production. However, fallow land, water scarcity and climate change are slowing progress – exacerbated by the exodus of young people, which leaves fields uncultivated.

### Agroecological roadmap as the answer

The Tarayana Foundation has developed an agroecological roadmap for a more sustainable food system. Led by Queen Mother Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck, the roadmap emphasises better governance, irrigation and market access. Proposals include the reactivation of fallow land, climate-resistant crops, digital weather and pest tools, less waste and more sustainable packaging. The initiative is part of a cooperation with Nepal and India, is being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and supports the 13th Five-Year Plan. ■



Photo: bhutantravel

# Bhutan promotes renewable irrigation systems

(ih) Source: BBS, 16 February 2025

## Strengthening agriculture and climate targets

**A**s a step towards climate-friendly agriculture and food security, Bhutan is promoting the introduction of lift irrigation systems powered by renewable energy. To this end, a high-level dialogue on 'Promoting Renewable Energy-Powered Lift Irrigation Systems in Bhutan' was held in Thimphu this week.

### Renewable energies as a driver of agricultural modernisation

The event emphasised the role of renewable energies in agricultural modernisation, improving living conditions in rural areas and Bhutan's climate targets. Currently, only around 20% of cultivated land is irrigated, which limits yields and increases dependence on fossil fuels for pumps in some cases. Irregular rainfall and falling river levels are exacerbating the situation.

### Lift irrigation with river water: Potential for land, jobs and CO<sub>2</sub> reduction

Lift irrigation powered by renewable energies is considered a sustainable alternative. An ICIMOD study estimates that this could irrigate an additional 62,000 acres – creating over 14,750 green jobs, 118 MW of



Photo: ICIMOD

clean energy and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by almost 68,000 tonnes per year.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, Karma Tshering, emphasised that such systems are not just technology, but also promote autonomy – especially for women in rural areas – while improving productivity, resilience and environmental performance.

The initiative is being implemented jointly by the Ministry of Energy, ICIMOD and the WERELIS Bhutan project – supported by Canada's IDRC. ■



# The farmers of Chhoekhorling focus on coffee

(ih) Source: *The Bhutanese*, 19 July 2025

*In Chhoekhorling (Pema Gatshel), coffee is replacing dying orange plantations – and bringing new hope and income to the population.*

**W**hat began two years ago as a small pilot project supported by the Bhutan Ecological Society and the Gewog administration has now expanded to several chiwogs. Farmers in the village of Gazawung saw initial success when their 2022 seedlings bore fruit. Encouraged by this, over 100 households in the chiwogs of Gazawung, Dizama, Yarjaywung and Arden-Khalatsho have started growing coffee.

## Expansion of plantations and local seedling production

The Gewog administration plans to expand the plantations to around 500 acres and continue to distribute seedlings free of charge. Farmers are also becoming more involved: some have started to produce coffee seeds locally so that supply can keep pace with demand.

## Market guarantee as a game changer

An important driver is the market guarantee provided by Bhutan Mountain Coffee. Company representatives promised to buy the entire harvest and sent vehicles to collect the beans directly from the villages – a significant improvement over past challenges of poor roads and distant markets for oranges. ‘After our orange trees died, it seemed like there was nothing left to grow,’ said a farmer from Gazawung. ‘But now coffee gives us hope, and a buyer has promised to purchase our harvest.’

Before the recent harvest in Gazawung, Arden-Khalatsho Chiwog had already achieved initial success, even though large-scale planting there had stalled due to a shortage of labour. Dizama and Yarjaywung have now also started mass planting, and Arden-Khalatsho is planning further expansion as more farmers join the scheme.

Looking ahead, the farmers hope to start selling coffee this year. If production continues to increase, Bhutan Mountain Coffee plans to set up a collection point in Nganglam, which would further reduce transport problems and bring the market closer. ■

# Mass production of mushrooms

(ih) Source: Business Bhutan, 10 July 2025

*In eastern Bhutan, entrepreneur Sonam Gyeltshen wants to meet the growing demand for mushrooms through mass production with his Samsara Integrated Agriculture Farm*



Photo: Unsplash

**S**ince its founding in 2019, he has transformed his business into a modern enterprise with the help of the CARLEP programme.

## **From 1,500 to 3,000 kilograms: scaling up through funding and technology**

With financial support, Sonam was able to increase production from 1,500 kg (2023) to 3,000 kg (2024) and also supplies mushroom spawn to other farmers. To ensure year-round cultivation, CARLEP integrated an IoT-based system in 2023 that digitally controls temperature and humidity.

With the aim of meeting regional demand, Sonam plans to expand his farm with new production facilities, laboratories and the cultivation of king oyster

mushrooms. Supported by national and regional programmes, he wants to contribute to economic growth in Bhutan.

## **Background: CARLEP – Commercialisation and Resilience in Eastern Bhutan**

The Commercial Agriculture and Resilient Livelihoods Programme (CARLEP) aims to facilitate the transition from a subsistence-based rural agricultural economy to a sustainable value chain and market-oriented production sector by promoting climate-friendly approaches in agriculture and strengthening the capacities of communities and local institutions.

The programme pursues a two-pronged approach: a value chain or commercialisation approach in gewogs with high production and marketing potential, and a targeted intervention approach in gewogs that are particularly vulnerable to poverty and the effects of climate change. The programme area covers selected gewogs in six eastern dzongkhags (Lhuentse, Mongar, Pema Gatshel, Samdrup Jongkhar, Trashi Yangtse and Trashigang). The programme will benefit 28,000 smallholder households, of which 5,000 households will directly benefit from the value chains for vegetables and dairy products.

## **Programme duration: 7 years**

Total programme cost: USD 31.526 million, financed by:

- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD): USD 14.27 million
- Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programmes (ASAP): \$5.023 million
- Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB): \$5.5739 million
- Food Corporation of Bhutan Limited (FCBL): \$4.802 million
- Beneficiaries: \$0.659 million. ■

# Agri Food Export & Marketing Seminar for the Singaporean Market

(ih) Source: DAMC on Facebook, 14 January 2026



Photo: Unsplash

In collaboration between JICA Bhutan and the Department of Agricultural Marketing and Cooperatives (DAMC), more than 20 agribusiness entrepreneurs completed a training programme on export requirements and procedures for the Singapore market, with a focus on product development, branding and marketing. The three-day training was led by Kanthiban, CEO of Business Engineers Asia, who provided insights into Singapore's market dynamics. Singapore is highly urbanised and covers over 90 per cent of its food needs through imports – a clear opportunity for Bhutanese exporters.

## Branding & marketing: only effective when combined

The training emphasised branding as a strategic basis and marketing as its implementation. Government representatives underscored the need for a stronger collective brand, as Bhutan's agricultural exports have been fragmented to date (e.g. herbal teas, spices, honey, niche beverages) and low visibility and weak collective market presence limit access to high-value markets. JICA Bhutan identified three key factors for export success: product development, certification/testing and marketing – including planned trade fair appearances in Singapore. Finally, JICA and DAMC exchanged practical application ideas with the participants in an interactive session. ■

# Roadmap for sustainable and market-oriented development

(ih) Source: World Bank, 30 September 2025

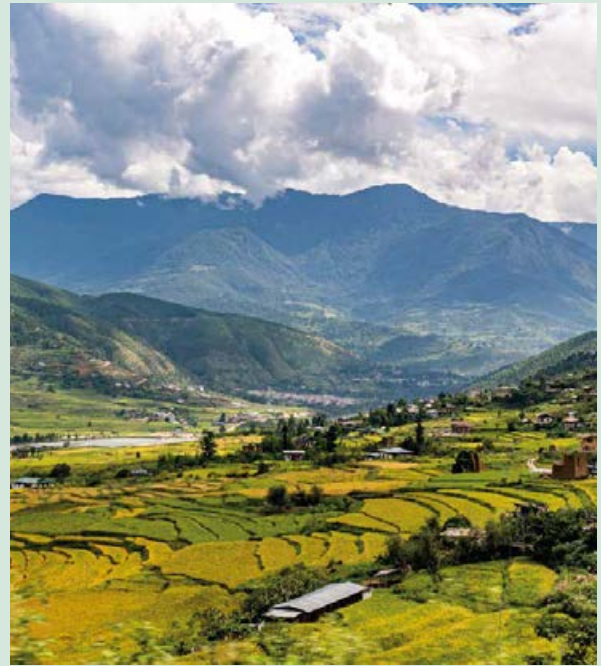


Photo: bhutan.travel

The transformation of Bhutan's agricultural and food system depends on shifting from production-oriented approaches to market-oriented, high-quality agriculture.

## Key to competitiveness and sustainability

The report outlines three key factors: better access to certification and finance, stronger collaboration between farmers and public-private partnerships, and the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship. Tailored marketing strategies and a gradual expansion of exports – with a focus on quality, traceability and branding – can help Bhutan tap into high-value niche markets while ensuring sustainability. Coordinated policy measures and investment in the value chain are crucial to making the sector more competitive, inclusive and resilient. ■

# The shrinking rice chamber of the East

(ih) Source: *The Bhutanese*, 12 June 2025

*How climate change is threatening Radhi's rice farming.*

**R**adhi Gewog in Trashigang, known as the 'rice granary of eastern Bhutan,' is seeing its once golden fields increasingly dry up. Climate change is disrupting rainfall patterns, lowering water levels and threatening traditional rice production – the backbone of food security in the east of the country.

## **Unpredictable monsoon, short growing season**

Delayed and irregular monsoon rains shorten the growing season, reduce soil moisture and make cultivation difficult. Most farmers depend on small mountain streams.

## **Voices from Radhi: Water shortages, costs and pressure**

62-year-old Yoenten Phuntsho reports that the monsoon is becoming increasingly unpredictable

and that there is a lack of irrigation channels. 'Without timely rain, the fields remain dry and yields decline.'

74-year-old Karma is also struggling with water shortages. Despite rising rice prices, high wages and irregular rainfall are putting pressure on farmers. He explained that there is a small water source at the top of Radhi Gewog, but no pump, and that the water is first used by the village in the upper Gewog, known as Chaymang Kadam. Only when their needs are met is the water forwarded to Karma's village, Radhi Pandang, which is located in the lower part of Radhi.

Karma hopes that the announced project will start soon, as his rice field is his only source of income. In addition, wild boars make cultivation difficult. 'For years, promises have been made to solve the water shortage – but little has changed to date.' ■

## The enduring legacy of the fourth king

(rw) Source: KUENSEL, 11 November 2025



Photo: Royal Bhutan Police

The environmental legacy of Bhutan's fourth king, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, is reflected in a vision that has made the country a global model for sustainable development. Inspired by Buddhist reverence for nature, he developed the concept of gross national happiness, which combines economic progress with cultural, social and ecological well-being – nature not as a resource, but as a pillar of national happiness.

A dense network of national parks and protected areas, connected by ecological corridors, now covers over half of the country's land area. The Forestry and Nature Conservation Act and the 2008 constitution enshrined environmental protection in law, including the obligation to keep at least 60 per cent of the country's land area permanently forested. Community forestry turned village communities into active guardians of the forests.

Almost all electricity comes from hydropower (surpluses in the rainy season are sold, while electricity is purchased from India in the dry season) – economically sensible and ecologically sound. Bhutan is considered climate neutral and binds more CO<sub>2</sub> than it emits. Despite climate change, urbanisation and waste problems, the central legacy remains: prosperity and nature conservation are allies. ■

## The Wangdue-chhoeling Palace was renovated

(kne) Source: Daily Bhutan, 2 May 2025

*A cultural revival in Bhutan*

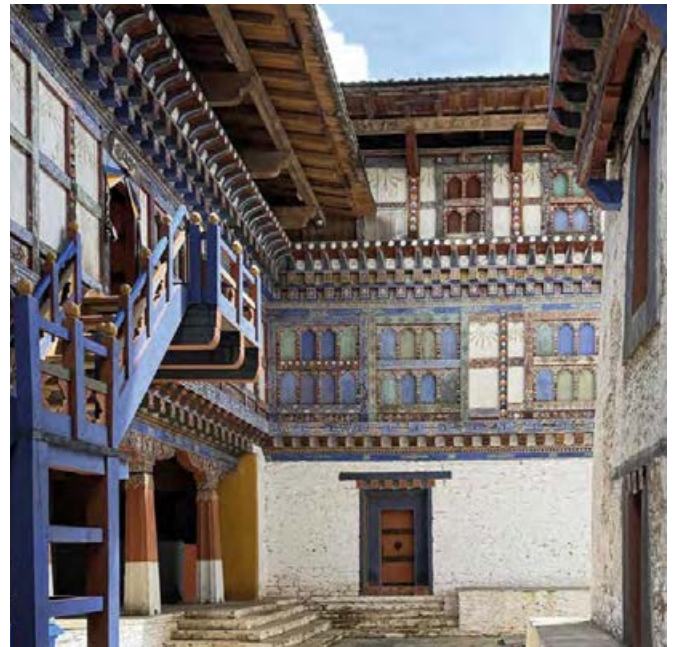


Photo: wcpalace.org

In the spiritual heart of Bhutan, in the district of Bumthang, an important architectural heritage site is being restored to its former glory: Wangdue-chhoeling Palace. After ten years of careful restoration, the former royal residence has been transformed into a living museum and cultural centre. Today, it honours Bhutan's rich history and builds a bridge between tradition and the future.

Built in 1857 by Jigme Namgyel, the father of the first king, the palace is considered the birthplace of the Bhutanese monarchy. For decades, it was the political centre and witnessed the birth of Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuck. However, with the relocation of the royal family and the capital, the palace began to fall into disrepair. Carvings, murals and wooden structures increasingly suffered from neglect.



Photo: rubinmuseum.org



Photo: wcpalace.org

## International cooperation and local expertise

The restoration is also an expression of international cooperation. The project was supported by donors from the USA and Switzerland, as well as by the U.S. Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation and international monument conservationists. At the same time, the project strengthened local expertise: Bhutanese craftsmen, architects and artists acquired valuable skills for future monument conservation projects.

In 2012, the Bhutan Foundation, together with the Ministry of Culture, launched an ambitious restoration project under the patronage of Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Tseyring Pem Wangchuck. The aim was to preserve the palace and revitalise it as a public cultural centre. Rotten components were replaced, surfaces were restored with traditional mineral paints, and modern elements such as fire protection and accessibility were carefully integrated.

## Cultural bridge between the past and the future

On 30 October 2024, the Wangduechhoeling Palace Museum and Cultural Centre was officially opened. The exhibitions guide visitors through the history of Bhutan, Bumthang and the palace. Artefacts, manuscripts, paintings and religious relics are complemented by interactive elements. One highlight is the rare sacred Tashi Gomang, a travelling shrine of which there are only 35 examples nationwide.

## A place that continues to grow

Beyond the building itself, the 20-hectare site is to become a cultural retreat with hiking and riverside trails connecting the palace and surrounding monasteries. Wangduechhoeling Palace symbolises Bhutan's efforts to combine modernisation and cultural identity – as a living place of learning, remembrance and inspiration for future generations. ■

More information: [www.wcpalace.org](http://www.wcpalace.org)



Photo: wcpalace.org

# The Global Peace Prayer Festival as part of Bhutan's future agenda

(kne) Sources: Website of the Global Peace Prayer Festival and buddhistdoor.net, 22 November 2025

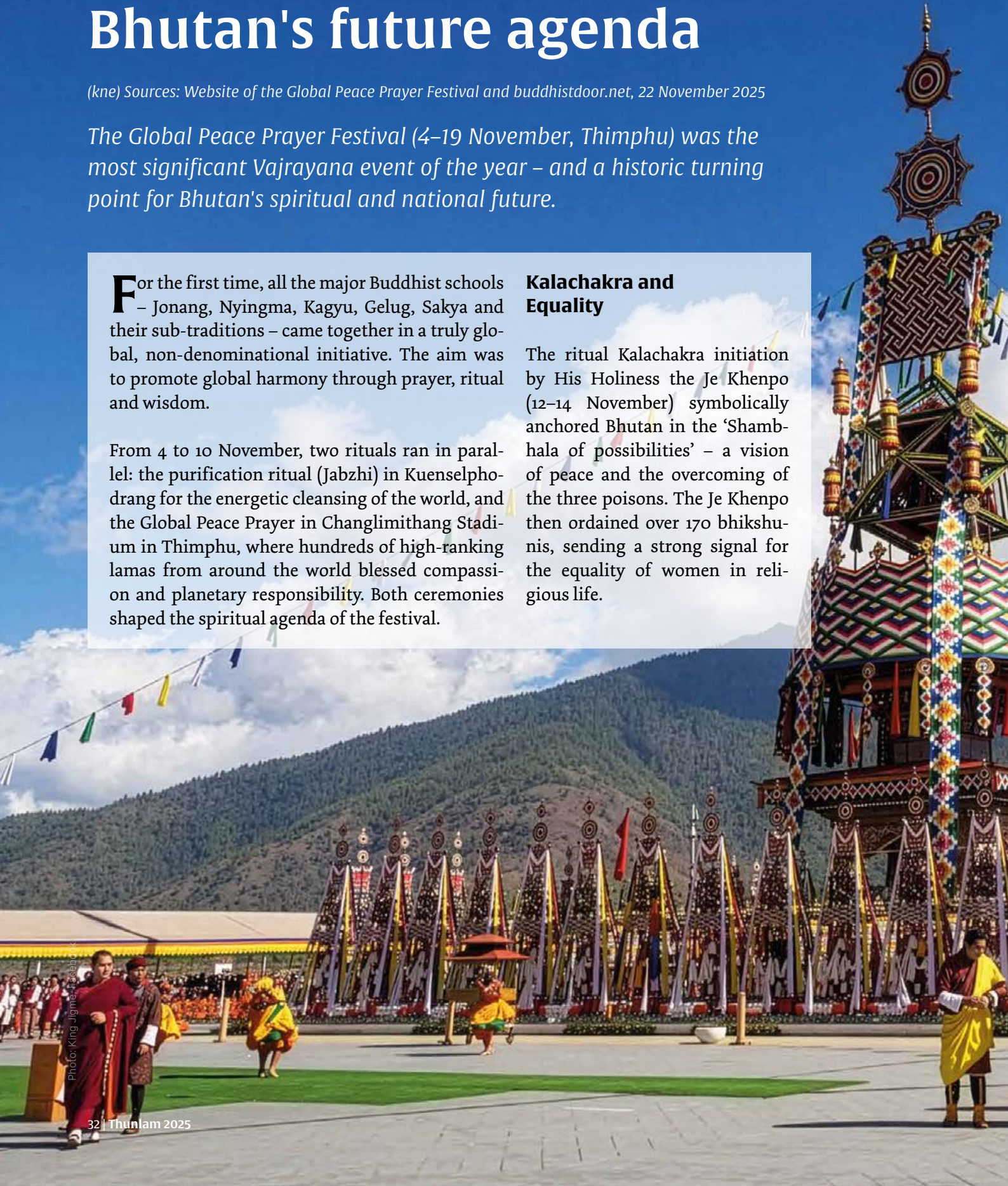
*The Global Peace Prayer Festival (4–19 November, Thimphu) was the most significant Vajrayana event of the year – and a historic turning point for Bhutan's spiritual and national future.*

**F**or the first time, all the major Buddhist schools – Jonang, Nyingma, Kagyu, Gelug, Sakya and their sub-traditions – came together in a truly global, non-denominational initiative. The aim was to promote global harmony through prayer, ritual and wisdom.

From 4 to 10 November, two rituals ran in parallel: the purification ritual (Jabzhi) in Kuenselphodrang for the energetic cleansing of the world, and the Global Peace Prayer in Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu, where hundreds of high-ranking lamas from around the world blessed compassion and planetary responsibility. Both ceremonies shaped the spiritual agenda of the festival.

## Kalachakra and Equality

The ritual Kalachakra initiation by His Holiness the Je Khenpo (12–14 November) symbolically anchored Bhutan in the ‘Shambhala of possibilities’ – a vision of peace and the overcoming of the three poisons. The Je Khenpo then ordained over 170 bhikshunis, sending a strong signal for the equality of women in religious life.





Photos: King Jigme, Facebook

The royal family, led by His Majesty the Fifth Druk Gyalpo, was present at all the main ceremonies. At the same time, there were important diplomatic events: the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the exhibition of the Piprahwa-Kapilavastu relics and the celebration of the 70th birthday of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. In his speech, His Majesty emphasised Bhutan's spiritual roots as the foundation of national identity and stability.

### Youth as bearers of peace and Bhutan's role in the world

A highlight of 2025 was the strong participation of Bhutanese and international youth. Forums and

dialogues strengthened them as drivers of peace, innovation and cohesion – with a focus on expertise, ethics, emotional intelligence and global awareness. Their initiatives, ranging from peace campaigns to climate protection, showed that peace work is cross-generational and forward-looking.

The GPPF was more than a religious event: it was a national declaration. It strengthened Bhutan's role as a spiritual centre and combined teaching, development and compassion. It concluded with a call to live peace internally – and to carry it outward through just, inclusive and responsible systems. ■



His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck with His Holiness Je Khenpo.

## Drinchengang to become first innovative model village

(kne) Source: KUENSEL, 16 June 2025



Photo: unedf.org

The centuries-old village of Drinchengang is facing a major transformation: thanks to a royal initiative, it is set to become Bhutan's first official historic village and, as a model village, will combine cultural heritage, digital innovation and sustainable lifestyles.

### Roots in the 17th century

Founded in the 17th century by craftsmen recruited to build dzongs and temples, Drinchengang, with its mud houses and terraced fields, is considered a living testimony to Bhutanese building culture. Today, around 800 people live there in 86 households.

Phase I began with the laying of the foundation stone on 15 June 2025: the residents are being relocated to Sulalumpa – for greater safety and better living conditions. Each family will receive a plot of land and a new house in traditional style but with modern standards; temporary accommodation is being supported by His Majesty's Kidu. ■

More information: <https://drv.gov.bt/>

## Palang as a stylish home accessory

(kne) Source: BBS, 1 September 2025



Photo: bhutan.travel

The palang, a traditional wooden container for the local brew ara, is now a sought-after home accessory. In Sangkama in Jurme Gewog, Mongar, its production has developed from an ancient tradition into an important source of income. Almost every man in the village makes palangs alongside farming. However, rising demand brings challenges, especially for the Dongtshong Shing tree (a type of nettle plant) from which the vessels are made and which is becoming increasingly rare.

### Palang boosts income in Sangkama, Mongar

42-year-old Rinchen Dorji makes palangs after working in the fields. He buys hollowed-out blanks for around 150 Nu, shapes them on a lathe, dyes and seals them. The final touch is silver decoration, which only three blacksmiths in the village still produce. Ten pairs take over a month to make and fetch 2,800–3,000 Nu per pair – around 100,000 Nu per year; quality is intended to sell mass-produced goods.

### Growing demand puts pressure on Dongtshong Shing

As Dongtshong Shing becomes scarcer, the craftsmen are planting more: over 200 seedlings are intended to secure raw materials, income and tradition. With the success of the Palang craft, the responsibility to preserve its natural basis is also growing. ■

# Dungkar Dzong – Where tradition meets the future

(kne) Source: *The Bhutan Live*, 21 December 2025



Photo: Bhutan Innovation Forum

**P**erched in the highlands of Pangbisa in the Paro Valley, Dungkar Dzong stands as a symbol of Bhutan's bridge between cultural heritage and modern future. A royal initiative, Dungkar Dzong combines classic monastery fortress architecture with modern functionality, continuing the role of dzongs as spiritual, political and cultural centres into the 21st century.

Pangbisa (2,500–3,000 m) has developed from a village into a growing centre and, surrounded by sacred sites such as Chomolhari, Ugyen Guru Lhakhang and Dongkola, forms a spiritual and geographical hub of Bhutan.

The dzong combines traditional craftsmanship with modern technology: local materials, sustainable construction and infrastructure with accessibility, Wi-Fi, and education and conference rooms characterise the campus.

At the heart of the dzong is the Druk Gyalpo's Institute with the Bhutan Baccalaureate, which combines national values with international standards. As a venue for global events, Dungkar Dzong represents Bhutan's transformation and future. ■

# Drukyl's Literature and Arts Festival

(kne) Source: *BBS*, 7 August 2025

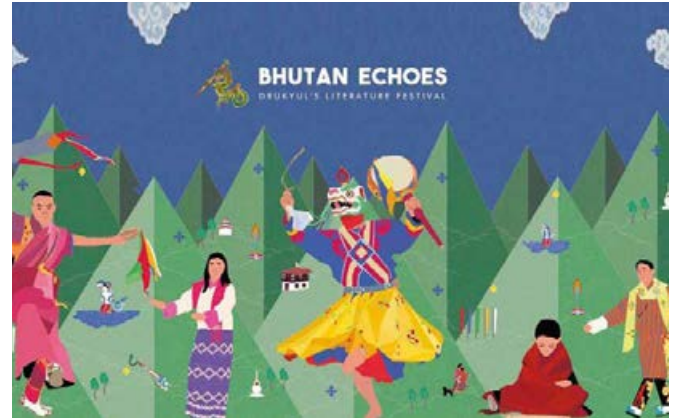


Photo: drukyul.org

**B**hutan's literary spirit blossoms at the Drukyl's Literature and Arts Festival 2025: At the end of the festival, words, ideas and impulses echo throughout Bhutan's literary scene. More and more local authors are stepping into the spotlight: Seven of the ten books presented were written by Bhutanese authors – ranging from life stories about democracy and history to memoirs.

## Strong voices, strong stories

The focus was on two remarkable women: entrepreneur Phub Zam and Kunzang Choden, the first Bhutanese woman to write an English-language novel. Choden presented her new work, 'Telling Me My Stories', which is influenced by childhood memories from Ogyen Choling and personal experiences. The Bhutan Echoes Legacy Award inspired her to write: 'This recognition was the spark that told me: Do something, get started!' Phub Zam presented 'Walking My Destiny: A Bhutanese Woman's Story' and called the festival a lifelong dream come true. Needrup Zangpo presented Drukpa Kunley, 'The Sacred Tales of a Mad Monk' and praised Bhutan Echoes as a stage for local voices.

The festival inspires across generations: young visitors report a new love of reading and creative impulses. Starting next year, a new award will also be presented – the Jigme Singye Wangchuck Literature and Arts Prize. As one of Asia's leading literature and arts festivals, it offers a place where voices are heard, ideas are shared and creativity is celebrated. ■

## In Bhutan, the water at the source is clean, but not drinkable from the tap

(hm/ih) Source: Kuensel, 20 February 2026



Photo: unicef.org

**B**hutan is considered an environmental pioneer, but a nationwide study shows that a lot of quality is lost between the source and the tap. RCDC analyses (2017–2024) found that only 52.8% of urban and 70.1% of rural samples met microbiological standards. Almost every second urban sample was contaminated with faecal bacteria; in eight dzongkhags, compliance was below 50%.

### Weaknesses in the system

During the monsoon season, turbidity and contamination increase, while disinfection measures are often inadequate: only 11.9% of the samples treated had sufficient residual chlorine. The reasons for this are damaged pipes, unprotected tanks and a lack of treatment – in many places, spring water is fed directly into the system.

Since 2023, the Department of Water has been coordinating administration nationwide; new standards (2025) and a task force are intended to improve monitoring, technology, testing and chlorination. Conclusion: A safe drinking water supply can only be achieved through a combination of technology, governance and behaviour. ■

## Traditional medicine is being strengthened

(hm/ih) Sources: Bhutan Nation, 3 December 2025, and Bhutan Ministry of Health, 28 November 2025)



Photo: moh.gov.bt

**M**ore and more people are turning to traditional medicine, which is why the Ministry of Health has developed a strategy to strengthen this sector. The Ministry of Health proudly announces the inauguration of the National Centre for Traditional Medicine (Sowa Rigpa) and an action plan for traditional medicine for 2025–2034. The reforms are intended to help the ancient healing tradition respond to the growing and changing needs of the people while preserving its cultural roots.

### Expansion and future strategy

Last year, more than 200,000 people used traditional medical services, representing 23% of all patients nationwide. In order to meet the growing demand, existing facilities are to be modernised, infrastructure improved, the training of traditional practitioners strengthened, research facilitated and the preservation of endangered medicinal plants achieved through community-based programmes.

The Ministry states that this strategy is also intended to support wellness tourism and promote the sustainable use of the country's own resources. The Bhutan Foundation has provided 44 million Ngultrum to support the strategy, for which it receives thanks at the inauguration ceremony. ■

# Construction of the Royal Centre for Infectious Diseases is progressing

(hm/ih) Source: Business Bhutan, 13 August 2025



Photo: Business Bhutan

**C**onstruction of the state-of-the-art hospital, which will be dedicated to the prevention, control and treatment of infectious diseases, is progressing faster than planned and is expected to be completed as early as June 2026.

## Centre of excellence for pandemic prevention and infectious medicine

The Royal Centre for Infectious Diseases (RCID) will be a reference centre designed to detect outbreaks more quickly, provide targeted care to patients and systematically train healthcare professionals. In addition to inpatient care, areas for diagnostics, outpatient care, training and coordination are also planned – so that the RCID will not only be a hospital, but also a central component of the national crisis and prevention structure. ■



Illustration

Illustration: Business Bhutan

# Unhealthy eating habits harm the next generation

(hm/ih) Source: Business Bhutan, 17 September 2025



Photo: UNICEF Bhutan

**B**hutan's Prime Minister and UNICEF are calling for stronger measures to protect children from junk food. The Ministry of Health is developing a national nutrition strategy with an action plan for 2026–2030 and eight priority areas.

Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay emphasised the urgency of the situation: in markets dominated by highly processed products, it is becoming increasingly difficult for families to eat healthily.

## Junk food as a health risk

A UNICEF survey from 2023 warns that the increasing consumption of soft drinks, salty snacks and fast food, which are readily available and often cheaper than healthier alternatives, is jeopardising the long-term health of children and young people and contributing to obesity.

The UNICEF representative in Bhutan emphasised that children are dependent on their parents and guardians for their nutrition. That is why healthy options are needed in communities and schools, and better habits need to be promoted. At a meeting in Thimphu, proven measures were recommended, such as junk food taxes and advertising restrictions for children. UNICEF is calling for political reforms, stricter rules, local programmes and parental involvement to achieve this. ■

# National study reveals massive lead contamination from Jinlabs to household items

(hm/ih) Source: *The Bhutanese*, 2 August 2025

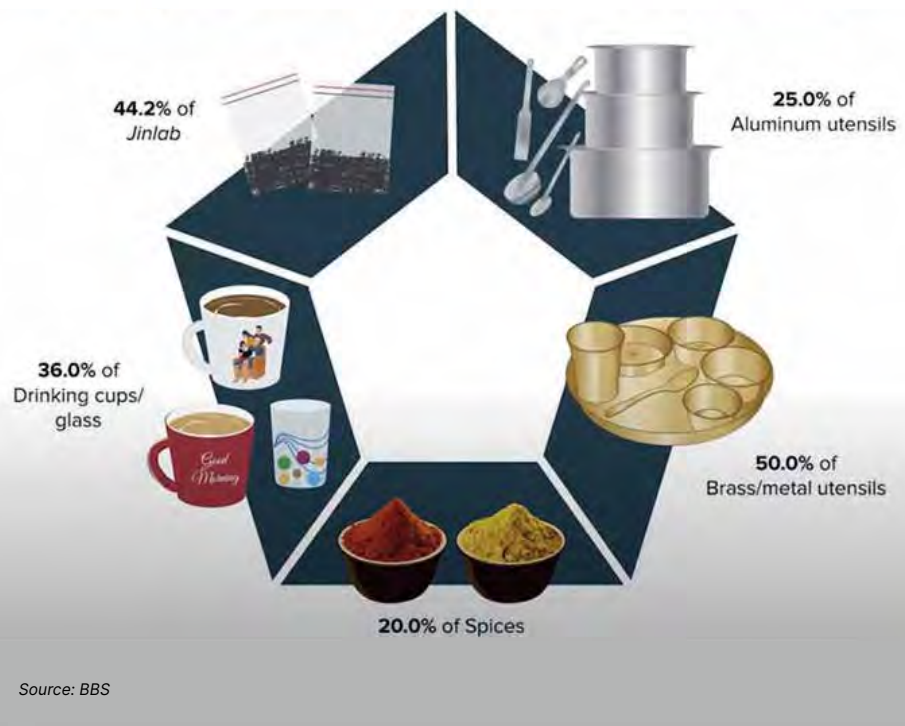
Report reveals extreme lead contamination in religious objects, spices, kitchen and household items, and toys – posing a particularly high risk to children.

A national blood lead study involving 2,400 samples from ten categories shows high lead contamination in consumable and non-consumable items – posing significant risks to children. Jinlab (sacred pills) and other religious objects show particularly high levels; children who receive Jinlab are significantly more likely to have elevated blood lead levels. Spices such as turmeric and chilli powder also exceed the limit values in some cases. Many kitchen utensils made of brass or metal also exceed the limit values. Almost half of household items and numerous fittings and handles contain lead.

## What is Jinlab?

Jinlab (*Tib. byin rlabs*) means ‘blessing’ and refers to a spiritual power that is transferred from Buddhas or realised masters to people or objects. It can also appear as consecrated pills that are ‘charged’ in ceremonies, distributed and consumed. In the study, jinlab is among the most contaminated samples: children who receive or have recently taken jinlab

Percentage of products tested with lead levels above the reference limit



show significantly higher blood lead levels than children without jinlab exposure.

## Why is this problematic?

Jinlab are often taken repeatedly and over long periods of time, sometimes by very young children, allowing lead to accumulate in the body. Since lead is particularly damaging to the developing nervous system, taking it significantly increases the risk of cognitive impairment and other health problems in children. ■

## 44.7% of children in Bhutan suffer from anaemia

(hm/jh) Source: Business Bhutan, 23 August 2025



Grafik: The Bhutanese

Almost half of Bhutan's children (aged 6–59 months) suffer from red blood cell deficiency. Experts attribute the high prevalence to poor nutrition and high lead exposure. Female adolescents (36%) and women of childbearing age – including pregnant women (33%) and non-pregnant women between 15 and 49 years of age (40%) – are also affected. According to the WHO, the consequences are serious: impaired cognitive and physical development, complications during pregnancy and childbirth, and overall lower performance and quality of life.

### Lead as an additional driver

The increased lead exposure in the blood of Bhutanese children (75% affected) is alarming. Lead impairs the body's ability to produce healthy red blood cells. At the same time, the lack of dietary diversity exacerbates the problem; existing nutrition programmes are sometimes met with low acceptance among those affected.

There is an urgent need for action to prevent further consequences for public health. New programmes – including nationwide prenatal care launched in May 2025, nutrient supplementation initiatives and the 'One Child, One Egg' campaign – are intended to improve care. ■

## Hotel industry calls for a target of 300,000 tourists

(kn) Source: The Bhutanese, 18 October 2025



Photo: bhutan.travel

The Bhutanese hotel industry is in a difficult situation: the number of hotels has more than doubled in recent years, while tourist numbers have fallen sharply since the pandemic. In 2019, there were over 315,000 visitors, but in 2024 only around 145,000. At the same time, the number of hotels has risen to almost 400, meaning that many establishments are now competing for significantly fewer guests.

The Hotel and Restaurant Association of Bhutan (HRAB) warns that many hotels are at economic risk without a significant increase in tourist numbers. It is therefore calling for the government's target of 300,000 tourists per year to be consistently pursued, as this is the only way to balance the oversupply of rooms. Short-term government aid could help in the transition, but it would not solve the structural problem.

The HRAB also criticises the lack of international marketing: without targeted campaigns, Bhutan is losing visibility in the competition. Discounts for groups, regular guests and passengers are proposed to increase arrivals. ■

# Annual Tourism Overview 2025

(kn) Source: : Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, Department of Tourism

The Department of Tourism's 'Tashel Melong' report provides an overview of tourism development in 2025.



The document aims to make key findings, measures and progress transparent – for the industry and the public. It is intended as an annual reflection of the activities of the ministry, authorities and tourism industry, which together position Bhutan as a high-quality, sustainable and regenerative travel destination.

## Strategic framework

The orientation is based on three guiding documents: the 21st Century Economic Roadmap, the Bhutan Integrated Tourism Master Plan 2025–2034 and the Industrial Development Roadmap. They define long-term goals such as higher GDP contribution, sustainable development and a resilient quality system.

## 2025 balance sheet: growth and revenue

In 2025, Bhutan recorded 209,376 visitors (+44% compared to the previous year). India remained the most important market, while the proportion of international guests increased. Revenue from the Sustainable Development Fee reached USD 43.31 million (just under +50% compared to 2024).

## Marketing and visibility

To position itself internationally, the Department of Tourism focused on media collaborations, influencer invitations, PR agencies in core markets and social media with over 40 million impressions – supplemented by trade fairs and roadshows.

## Quality and products

Stricter standards, controls and training increased professionalism: around 2,400 guides were tested, 84% of whom were classified as qualified; mandatory drug testing was also introduced. At the same time, new offerings ('Star Attractions', monthly events), infrastructure measures (rest areas, toilets) and initiatives to prevent littering on trekking routes were introduced.

## Cooperation and outlook

Digital systems and exchange formats such as the Tourist Registration System and a monthly Tourism Bulletin were expanded. Conclusion: 2025 brought clear progress – with a continued focus on quality, diversification and Bhutan's positioning as a sustainable premium destination. ■



In respektvoller Verbindung mit der Natur: Die Pflanzensammler\*innen bringen die Äste der Himalayakiefer zur Destille

ADVERTISEMENT



## Terra Himalaya: Vorangehen im Einklang mit der Vision Bhutans

**Angetrieben vom Wunsch, Mensch und Natur in harmonischem Einklang zu verbinden und überzeugt davon, dass Heilen im ganzheitlichen Sinne nur durch bestmögliche Reinheit der Pflanzenstoffe möglich ist, pflegt PRIMAVERA, der Aromatherapie- und Naturkosmetikhersteller aus dem Allgäu, eine enge Verbindung mit seinen Anbaupartner\*innen – so auch mit Bhutan.**

Seit der Gründung 1986 wählt und verarbeitet PRIMAVERA für seine Produkte mit größter Sorgfalt nur naturreine, möglichst biologische Pflanzenstoffe. 13 Bio-Anbaupartner\*innen versorgen das Unternehmen direkt mit Rohstoffen aus aller Welt. Auf der Suche nach ätherischem Lemongrassöl besuchten die Unternehmensgründer\*innen Ute Leube und Kurt L. Nübling erstmals 1990 das Königreich Bhutan. Dass das Leben im Einklang mit der Natur in diesem Land eine elementare Rolle spielt, spricht den PRIMAVERA Gründer\*innen aus dem Herzen. „Die einzigartige Schönheit der Natur und wie die Menschen dort im Einklang mit ihr leben, hat uns von Anfang an fasziniert“, betont Kurt L. Nübling.

### **EIN NEUES KAPITEL IN DER ZUSAMMENARBEIT MIT BHUTAN**

Um die Menschen noch mehr mit den heilsamen Pflanzenkräften der unberührten Natur Bhutans zu verbinden,

gründete PRIMAVERA 2023 das eigene Anbaupartner-Unternehmen Terra Himalaya und wird somit erstmals selbst zum Hersteller naturreiner ätherischer Öle. Die neun Mitarbeitenden erlernen an der neuen Destille die sorgfältige Gewinnung ätherischer Öle.

### **SCHÄTZE DES HIMALAYA: HIMALAYAKIEFER UND NARDE**

Das erste Produkt, das Terra Himalaya zunächst von einem Partner-Destillateur bezieht, ist das ätherische Himalayakieferöl, eine Duft rarität in Bio-Qualität. Pflanzensammler\*innen sammeln die Zweige der Himalayakiefer in von der bhutanischen Forst- und Naturschutzbehörde ausgewiesenen Gebieten in den Höhen des Trongsats in Zentralbhutan. In großen Bündeln wird das Pflanzenmaterial traditionell auf dem Rücken zu Fuß zur Destille getragen. Das Öl duftet frisch, balsamisch, richtet auf und tröstet.

Neu hinzu kommt 2026 das ätherische Nardenöl: Die Wurzeln der baldrianartigen Heilpflanze werden im Hochland Bhutans streng kontrolliert wildgesammelt. Der tief erdige, warme Duft des Öls bringt Geborgenheit und innere Ruhe. „Die Produkte, die wir aus Bhutan bekommen, sind sehr besonders. Sie haben eine Strahlkraft, die diesen Spirit und diese „Noch-Gesundheit“ der Natur in sich tragen“, schwärmt Ute Leube.

### **Körperöl Lemongrass Himalayakiefer:**



Waldige Frische aus Bhutan für jeden Tag

- 100 ml Mandelöl bio oder Jojobaöl bio
- 8 Tr. Himalayakiefer bio
- 5 Tr. Lemongrass bio

#### **SO GEHT'S:**

Die ätherischen Öle in das Bio Pflegeöl geben und in die feuchte Haut einmassieren.



### **IM EINKLANG MIT DER VISION BHUTANS**

Das Sammeln der Pflanzen und die Ölherstellung bieten den Menschen eine wichtige zusätzliche Einnahmequelle und wirken der Landflucht entgegen. Traditionelles Wissen bleibt auch bei den jungen Menschen erhalten. Heute arbeitet Terra Himalaya mit über 165 Bauernfamilien zusammen. Wissenstransfer, Forschung, der Aufbau lokaler Manufakturen und der Ausbau ländlicher Wertschöpfung stehen im Einklang mit der Vision Bhutans zum Wohl künftiger Generationen.



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# Bumthang – spiritual heartland of Bhutan

(kn) Source: *The Bhutan Life*, 15 September 2025

*On the occasion of the 118th National Day celebrations, Bumthang was the centre of attention for all Bhutanese.*

The main event, featuring the King's speech, took place in Jakar on the grounds of Wangdue-choeling Palace, within whose walls Bhutan's first king, Ugyen Wangchuck, was born.

Bumthang is also closely associated with the 8th-century Guru Padmasambhava, who brought Buddhism to Bhutan, and is the home of Tertön Pema Lingpa, a revered spiritual master and treasure revealer.

## Location and landscape

Bumthang is located in the centre of Bhutan and encompasses four picturesque valleys: Choekhor, Chumey, Tang and Ura. These valleys, formed by ancient glaciers, are characterised by rolling hills and lush vegetation, making Bumthang not only one of Bhutan's most impressive regions, but also its historical and spiritual heart.



## Sacred sites and history

Dotted with sacred temples, monasteries and spiritual sites, the Bumthang Valley has a rich history. Among its notable landmarks is Jambay Lhakhang, one of the oldest Buddhist temples, built in 659 AD by the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo. It is said that this temple was part of a larger initiative to build 108 temples in a single day to subdue a powerful demoness.

### Jakar Dzong

Among the must-see sights in Bumthang is Jakar Dzong, also known as the 'White Bird Castle'. Perched on a ridge overlooking the Choekhor Valley, this historic fortress was built in 1549 by Lam Nagi Wangchuk. It served as the seat of the first king of Bhutan and features a striking 50-metre-high central tower, known as Utse, which is seamlessly integrated into the outer wall. A walled passageway leads to the fortified Chhu Dzong (water tower), which historically housed spring water that was used during long sieges.



### Jambay Lhakhang

Another important site is Jambay Lhakhang, dedicated to Maitreya Buddha. One of the oldest temples in Bhutan, it was built to defeat an evil demoness. Its courtyard becomes the centre of attention during the annual Jambay Lhakhang Drub, attracting large crowds to the sacred dances.

### Kurje Lhakhang

Kurje Lhakhang is another important spiritual site, named after the body imprint left by Guru Rinpoche in the cave where he meditated. The complex consists of three temples, the oldest of which was built in 1652, with an annual Tshechu held in June featuring performances of the Guru Tshengye mask dance.



Photo: bhutan.travel



*With its rich spiritual heritage, breathtaking landscapes and warm-hearted community, Bumthang is a destination that impressively embodies the essence of Bhutan.*

### Tamzhing Monastery

Founded in 1501 by Terton Pema Lingpa, Tamzhing Monastery is an important centre of the Peling tradition of Buddhism in Bhutan. Believed to have been built with the help of dakinis, the monastery houses impressive statues of Guru Rinpoche, Maitreya Buddha and Buddha Sakyamuni.

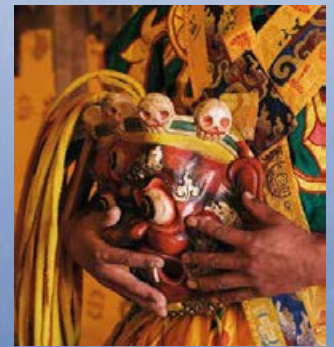
### Mebartsho, the burning lake

During a visit to Bumthang, a trip to Mebartsho, the burning lake, is essential. Located near the village of Tang, Terton Pema Lingpa discovered hidden treasures of Guru Rinpoche here in the 15th century. The breathtaking landscape adds to its mystique.

### Festivals and vibrant culture

One of the best ways to experience the vibrant culture of Bumthang is through its festivals. The Jakar Tshachu is a three-day celebration featuring lively mask dances performed in the courtyard of Jakar Dzong, the district's official festival.

Another highlight is the Jambay Lhakhang Drup, a four-day event known for its sacred midnight naked dance, which attracts crowds of locals and visitors alike. Every two years, the Buli Mani Festival brings together the locals of Buli village for three days of masked dances, predominantly from the Peling tradition.



Photos: bhutan.travel

Photo: Wikipedia



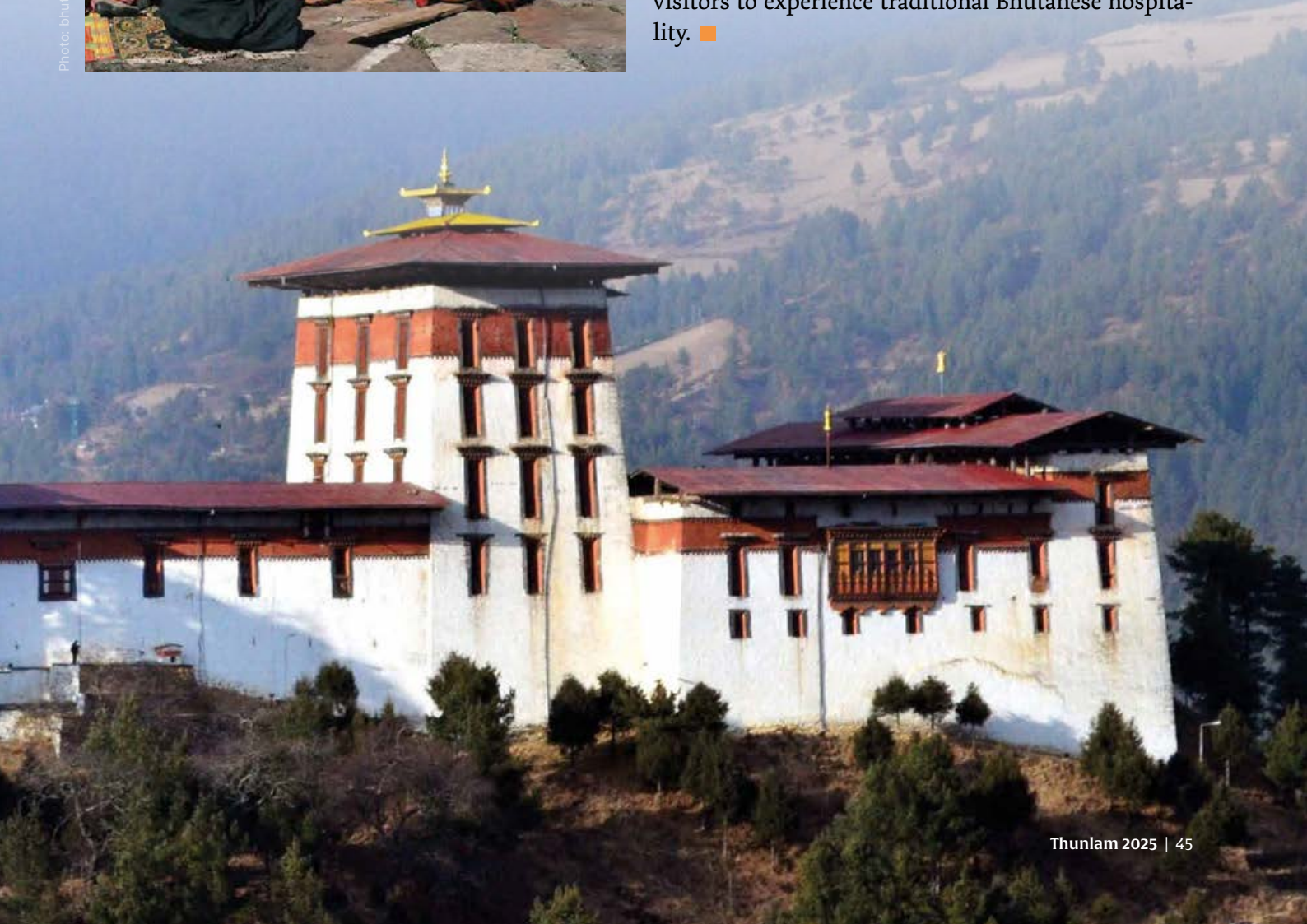


Photos: bhutan.travel

## Crafts, cuisine and hospitality

Bumthang is also famous for its hand-woven textiles, especially yathras. Visitors can watch these intricate pieces being woven, making it a must-see for textile lovers. Culinary delights, local specialities such as khurley (buckwheat pancakes), puta (buckwheat noodles) and dengo (buckwheat dough) showcase the flavours of the region.

Accommodation in Bumthang ranges from luxury hotels to guesthouses and homestays, allowing visitors to experience traditional Bhutanese hospitality. ■



# Bhutan's national brand film 'Bhutan Believe' receives award

(kn) Source: Daily Bhutan, 27 June 2025

*Bhutan's brand film 'Bhutan Believe' won silver for best tourism country video at the US International Awards 2025.*

The film was a collaboration between the Department of Tourism (DoT) under the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment (MoICE) and Studio Khonsu, a London-based creative studio founded by Adam Slama.

## A modern invitation for young travellers

According to a press release from MoICE, the film, which was shot and produced in 2024, was conceived as a modern, cinematic invitation for younger travellers to visit Bhutan. It highlights lesser-explored regions such as Gangtey and Bumthang in central Bhutan.

With an original voiceover in the local language Dzongkha, the film brings a fresh perspective on Bhutan that promotes the spirit of mindful adventure.

## Confirmation of Bhutan's creative direction

DoT Director Damcho Rinzin said that the recognition by the US International Awards was a confirmation of the creative direction of sharing Bhutan's story with a new generation of global travellers. "Bhutan Believe" is more than a film; it is a call to explore Bhutan not just as a destination, but as a path to deeper self-discovery.'

The press release adds that the film, shot entirely on location, brings Bhutan's core values – sustainability, culture and inner transformation – to life through a modern lens. 'At its core is a message that goes far beyond tourism: believing in purpose, in progress rooted in tradition, and in the power of travel to change lives.'





## A deeply personal inspiration

Adam Slama, founder of Studio Khonsu, described working on the film as an extraordinary and unique experience. In October 2023, he travelled to Bhutan for the first time for the Strive Challenge expedition, during which his team hiked through the spectacular Himalayan landscapes. This left a deep impression on him, especially the vibrant culture and the masked dancers. It was the synchronised movements of the dancers and the resonant sounds that shaped his vision for the project. 'I wanted to translate this experience into a visual story, with masked dance as the central theme, to guide viewers through Bhutan's magic, wonder and cultural richness,' he said.

## A message of self-confidence and optimism

Bhutan's national brand, 'Bhutan Believe', reflects the country's confidence in its future, rooted in the wisdom of its past. The slogan highlights Bhutan's potential, its opportunities and the collective optimism of its people, calling on citizens and visitors alike to embrace the kingdom's aspirations and contribute to its continued growth and resilience. ■

# BHUTAN

## *Believe*

About the brand film  
'Bhutan Believe':



# Nature, narrative and Bhutanese identity: tourism in 2025

(kn) Source: Business Bhutan, 29 December 2025

*In 2025, Bhutan's tourism sector experienced a significant revival after the difficult pandemic years.*



The country positioned itself as a destination for authentic, sustainable and culturally rich experiences – in line with the concept of gross national happiness. International awards and numerous festivals strengthened Bhutan's profile and demonstrated how closely nature, culture and spirituality are intertwined in the kingdom.

## Awards and international visibility

One of the early highlights was the Druk Neykor programme receiving the National Geographic Traveller Golden Travel Route Award. Bhutan's storytelling also received recognition: the brand film 'Bhutan Believe', shot in Gangtey and Bumthang, won silver at the US International Awards 2025 and was a finalist at the Cannes Corporate Media & TV Awards. This strengthened Bhutan's position as a destination that impressively conveys beauty and authenticity.

## Festivals as a stage for culture and nature

Numerous festivals attracted visitors from home and abroad: Rhododendron Week in Merak and Sakteng, the Haa Spring Festival and the 10th Rhododendron Festival in Thimphu celebrated biodiversity, music, dance and local cuisine. Later, the Black Mountain Festival, Jhomolhari Mountain Festival and Royal Highland Festival put the spotlight on highland culture – with yak races, games and performances by the local population.

## Regenerative tourism and new standards

The Matsutake Mushroom Festival combined nature experiences, cuisine and community. The Regenerative Bhutan Forum provided impetus for environmentally friendly tourism, while the Bhutan Green Hotel

Standard aims to promote sustainable business practices. Nature festivals such as the Black-necked Crane Festival in Phobjikha Valley and the Bhutan Bird Festival in Zhemgang put nature conservation in the spotlight.

## Greater presence on the world market

Bhutan increased its visibility internationally: a charter agreement between Drukair and Chan Brothers Travel (Singapore) is expected to bring in over 1,500 visitors. Bhutan also presented itself at the International Travel Expo in Vietnam and received a bronze medal at Expo 2025 in Osaka for its pavilion 'Saving Lives for a Happy Future'.

## Spirituality as the tone of the year

Spiritual events rounded off the year: the Global Peace Prayer Festival stood for hope and harmony, and the Druk Wangyel Tshechu at Dochula Pass concluded the year with impressive mask dances and sacred rituals.

Overall, Bhutan's tourism industry proved to be resilient, innovative and value-based in 2025. The country offers experiences that are not only beautiful but also meaningful – a combination of culture, nature conservation and community that honours the past and shapes a sustainable future.. ■



# Telling Me My Stories

(rw) Source: Book review by Jaya Bhattacharji Rose, 29 August 2025

*Kunzang Choden, the first Bhutanese woman whose works have been published in English, writes about her childhood.*

**T**elling Me My Stories' is an impressive autobiography that truly lives up to the book's title. It is almost as if Kunzang took these fragments of stories she heard or that were passed down from generation to generation and attempted to create a coherent narrative about her family. She was orphaned at a very young age – her father died when she was 9 years old and her mother died a few years later. Over the years, Kunzang heard stories about them that prompted her to piece their stories together. She has done this very well in this book.

## From oral tradition to a coherent narrative

Her ability to tell stories and collect and retell forgotten Bhutanese folk tales has become an important art form – and enables her to tell her family's story in this way. She focuses on herself and her ancestors, piecing together fragments of oral tradition and memories to form facts and weaving them into a coherent narrative. This is a demanding task that requires patience, perseverance and thorough research – which is exactly what Kunzang accomplishes in 'Telling Me My Stories'.

As she pieces together the history of her ancestors, especially her parents, she also manages the remarkable feat of documenting Bhutan's transfor-

mation from a closed nation based on a barter economy to the modern country it is today. She points to the various social reforms introduced by the government, including the promotion of education for Bhutanese children in India. Kunzang was one of those who benefited from this programme, even though it required a 15-day trek from Bhumthang (central Bhutan) to Kalimpong, India. Quite a change to a new life when you leave home for the first time as a nine-year-old girl. ■

**Book:**  
Telling Me  
My Stories:  
Kunzang  
Choden,  
Bloomsbury  
India.



Excerpts from  
this book, which  
is well worth  
reading, can  
be found here:



# My year abroad: From Thimphu to Amsterdam

*Chimi Dema: rooted in Thimphu and the desire for more.*

**M**y name is Chimi Dema and I grew up in Thimphu, the capital of Bhutan. The city was my home for twenty-two years – until I graduated from Royal Thimphu College. In my third year of study, I applied for an exchange programme: an extra year of study, but a unique opportunity that I seized.

## Amsterdam as a dream – and as reality

When I decided to spend an exchange year in Europe, I expected travel, fun and new experiences. My year at Vrije University in Amsterdam fulfilled all of that – and at the same time became a journey of self-discovery. Amsterdam was more than just a backdrop: the city became a real home.

## Freedom and work-life balance

I was fascinated not only by the canals and historic buildings, but above all by the freedom and balance of the city. I enjoyed my independence: studying, working part-time – and still having time for Amsterdam and friends. The European work-life balance gave me a new quality of life; I was inspired by the pace, the people and the open atmosphere.

Even though my exchange year is coming to an end, this chapter is not yet closed for me. My time at Vrije University has strengthened my desire to continue my academic career in Europe – especially in the Netherlands. I would like to return for further studies.



## Travelling through Europe – with Bhutan always by my side

Trips beyond the Netherlands also enriched my year and allowed me to form new, lasting connections. At official events or chance encounters, I repeatedly met people who knew Bhutan – or I was given the opportunity to introduce my country. The reception on National Day in Brussels and Bhutan Day in Berlin were particularly impressive. They showed me that wherever there are Bhutanese people, there is a feeling of home – supported by community, hospitality and mutual support.

## Gratitude and solidarity

My exchange year was much more than just fun and travel: it was a journey into independence and to myself. An experience that connected my small world with a much larger one. Europe showed me how big the world is and how close it can be at the same time. I am particularly grateful to the DBHG for inviting me to Bhutan Day at the Dharma Mati Centre in Berlin – a fitting end to a year full of encounters, growth and solidarity. ■



# 1986–2026 | 40 years of the German Bhutan Himalaya Society

*There are places that touch us and change our view of the world – Bhutan is one such place. When a small group came together in Germany in 1986, it was this fascination that brought them together: a fascination with a country where spirituality, nature and the common good come together – and which follows its own 'Middle Path' between progress and mindfulness.*



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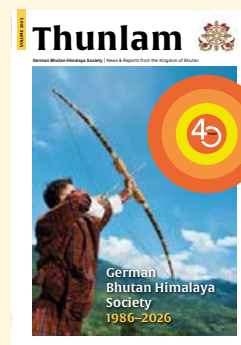
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*“Thunlam”  
(phonetic = mthun lam)  
means friendship,  
friendly relations,  
goodwill.*



**German-Bhutan  
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