



## Two diverse nations with a shared heritage



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**B**hutan and India's shared spiritual heritage is in many ways the unchanging constant in the age-old bilateral relationship that has forged and transformed over the ages.

Celebrating this common heritage – Buddhism – a press release from the Indian Embassy states that from the plains of Magadha in India, the teachings of Lord Buddha traveled to the Land of Thunder Dragon over centuries, courtesy monks and scholars.

Further, the legendary Indian mystic Guru Padmasambhava is credited with introducing Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8th century A.D.

Today, Buddhism is embedded into the very landscape of the Kingdom. The Bhutanese constitution also declares that Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan and that it is the responsibility of the state to preserve, protect and promote the cultural heritage, including monuments, Dzongs (fort-monastery), Lhakhangs (temple), and other places and objects

of artistic and historical interest.

Preservation of culture is also one of the four pillars of Gross National Happiness; a development paradigm espoused by His Majesty the 4th Druk Gyalpo.

"In keeping with our shared spiritual heritage as well as the developmental priorities of the country, India is honoured to have been part of many projects involving the renovation of heritage sites in Bhutan," the press release states.

The press release stated that in the past, India had renovated sacred sites such as the Semtokha Dzong, Paro Dzong, Lhuentse Dzong, Trashigang Dzong, and the Phajoding Lhakhang. India has also constructed the Dagana Dzong and been part of conservation efforts at Gasa Dzong.

Going forward, six key cultural projects are being funded as part of the development assistance committed by Government of India (GoI) to Bhutan under the 12th Five Year Plan (FYP). An amount of Nu 1,691-million has been committed

for these projects.

India is financially supporting the reconstruction of Wangduephodrang Dzong which was damaged in a tragic fire incident in 2012. The objective of the project is to rebuild the Dzong to its former glory, keeping the traditional architecture intact while making the structure disaster resilient.

The restoration works of the Dzong will be completed in July 2022. Through its project tied assistance to Bhutan, India is also helping restore the Rigsum Goempa Lhakhang, a prominent religious site in Bhutan located in Trashiyangtse Dzongkhag.

The project will help restore the main Lhakhang, construct a Drasha (monk hostel) and develop the site in its entirety the press release stated.

India is also providing financial assistance for the restoration of Lingzhi Dzong which was constructed in 1667 as the last frontier Dzong bordering Tibet.

Situated at a height of 4,150 meters in the remote region of Lingzhi under Thimphu Dzong-

khag, the dzong had suffered major damages during the earthquake of September 2011.

The site of Sangchen Choekar Monastery in Paro, which was also damaged during the 2011 earthquake, is being restored through funding by the Government of India.

Besides restoration and conservation works, GoI is undertaking construction and expansion works at Pemagatshel Dzong and Sarpang Dzong as part of the PTA under the 12th FYP.

In addition to the financial assistance for the restoration and conservation of iconic cultural sites in Bhutan, the press release added that India also offers scholarships, cultural exchange programmes and courses in Sanskrit studies and Buddhist philosophy which are regularly availed by many deserving students and practitioners from Bhutan.

GoI has also recently granted two acres of land in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh for the construction of a Buddhist temple and guest house for monks of the Central Monastic

Body, who are expected to visit Varanasi in large numbers, given that Deer Park, the site where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon on the noble truths, is only 10-kms away.

In 2016, India had loaned a precious six feet tall statue of Zhabdrung Rinpoche to Bhutan and the statue was subsequently placed at Semtokha Dzong, a spiritual landmark and the oldest Dzong.

To commemorate the birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche in June 2021, the GoI had gifted a statue of Lord Buddha which was consecrated at the Kuenray or the sanctum sanctorum of the majestic Tashichhoe Dzong.

The precious thread of Buddhism which ties India and Bhutan continues to be an important pillar of the bilateral relationship.

The GoI is further committed to furthering these engagements with the people and the government in Bhutan in order to preserve and celebrate the rich intangible cultural heritage of our region.