

## Embassy of India

### Thimphu

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#### **Bhutan - India Development Cooperation in the field of Cultural Heritage**

Buddhism- the shared spiritual heritage of India and Bhutan- is in many ways the unchanging constant in the age-old bilateral relationship. 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. The legendary Indian mystic Guru Padmasambhava is credited with introducing Vajrayana Buddhism to Bhutan in the 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Today, Buddhism is embedded into the very landscape of the Kingdom: the Bhutanese constitution 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 4<sup>th</sup> Druk Gyalpo.

In keeping with our shared spiritual heritage as well as the developmental priorities of the Royal Government, India is honoured to have been part of many projects involving the renovation of heritage sites in Bhutan. In the past, India has renovated sacred sites such as the Semtokha *Dzong*, Paro *Dzong*, Lhuentse *Dzong*, Trashigang *Dzong*, and the Phajoding *Lakhang*. India has also constructed the Dagana *Dzong* and been part of conservation efforts at Gasa *Dzong*. **Going forward, six key cultural projects of the Royal Government are being funded as part of the development assistance committed by Government of India to Bhutan under the 12th Five Year Plan.** An amount of Nu./Rs. 1691 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.

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 4150 meters in the remote region of Lingzhi in Northern Bhutan, 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, India is undertaking construction and expansion works at **Pemagatshel Dzong** and **Sarpang Dzong** as part of the Project Tied Assistance under the 12th Five Year Plan.

In addition to the financial assistance for the restoration and conservation of iconic cultural sites in Bhutan, 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. Government of India has also recently granted 2 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 4 Noble Truths, is only 10 kms away. In 2016, India had loaned a precious 6 feet tall statue of Zhabdrung Rinpoche, Bhutan's founder and unifier, to the Royal Government of Bhutan; the statue was subsequently placed at Bhutan's spiritual landmark and the oldest *Dzong*- the Semtokha *Dzong*. To commemorate the birth anniversary of Guru Rinpoche in June 2021, India gifted a statue of Lord Buddha to Bhutan which was consecrated at the *Kuenray* or the sanctum sanctorum of the majestic *TashichhoeDzong*- the seat of Bhutan's government.

The precious thread of Buddhism which ties India and Bhutan continues to be an important pillar of the bilateral relationship. Government of India is committed to furthering these engagements with the people and the Royal Government of Bhutan in order to preserve and celebrate the rich intangible cultural heritage of our region.

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