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CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM, CRITICAL APPRECIATION

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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of Bhutan Journal.

Page 5

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Waters of Bhutan

Govinda Rizal

On average 75 billion tons of freshwater exit from Bhutan every year. Bhutan is perhaps one of the few countries rich in freshwater. A Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report mentioned that Bhutan's per capita fresh water was 108,476, 557 liters in 2014. Yet, the water on each person's share is of little use, as they don't get to use it. Due to a shift in the peoples' lifestyle and habits, current water management is not enough to meet their future needs.

Page 6

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Bhutan Within the Indo-Pacific Strategies

C M Niroula

The security threat posed by rising China in Indo-Pacific region has raised fear of possible shift in the world order – that had remained under tight fist of the United States for over a century. China is flexing economic and military muscles that is likely to substitute America's dominance in international politics. As China crawls to Asia Pacific region, the US has unveiled its new strategy to counter the rise of Communist China.

Page 17

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Contemporary Bhutan's Faulty Policies & Remedies

Ram Karki

Bhutan is no exception when it comes to effect of globalisation and its tight measures to avoid wind of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation will bound to fail sooner if not later. Internet and social media have already been playing their influential roles in connecting both former and present Bhutanese citizens.

Page 26

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Climate Change Impact in Bhutan

I P Adhikari

The Himalayas is serious victim of climate change. Melting ice and decreasing ice reserves indicate a disastrous future for those who rely on the Himalayas for water sources. The impacts are already visible in the form of flash floods, GLOF and unpredictable monsoon. Results are declining agricultural production, scarcity of water resources and deterioration of human health.

Page 36

Citation: Adhikari, I. P. (2020). Climate change impact in Bhutan. *The Bhutan Journal*, 1(1); 36-51. doi.org/10.55564/tbj11ipa20cx

Jumpstarting Nepal-Bhutan Relationship

John Narayan Parajuli

A breakthrough in Nepal-Bhutan relationship in the past had been rendered near impossible given the mistrust over refugee issue coupled with lack of autonomy in Thimpu vis-à-vis conduct of its foreign and defence policy. With resettlement of Bhutanese refugees and revision of Bhutan-India Friendship Treaty 1949, there is tremendous scope for a strong bilaterally beneficial relationship now.

Page 52

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EDITORIAL

Dear Readers,

We welcome you to the inaugural issue of Bhutan Journal published by Bhutan Watch.

Bhutan Journal is the first attempt from Bhutanese in Diaspora to look deeper into the Bhutanese issues that are outside the four walls of everyday domain and discussion. It is our sincere effort to engage every Bhutanese into an intensive and fruitful conversation about issues affecting Bhutan and Bhutanese people. Whether inside the country or outside, contribution to Bhutan continues until the Bhutanese spirit is alive. It is our divine duty to keep this spirit alive for generations to come.

As we spread across the globe, our busy schedule keeps us disconnected from Bhutan. There is an unintended disconnection between Bhutanese in Diaspora and those living in Bhutan. Bhutan Journal shall make efforts to bridge the extreme ends of the same community and to build consensus in Diaspora about our ability to contribute towards reshaping a fair and just future.

The journal shall contain anything to everything about Bhutan. Articles both appreciating and critical analysis of Bhutan's efforts on modernism, philosophies, development, political process, economy, human rights, discrimination, and current affairs are welcome. We respect constructive criticism and critical appreciation. There is no restriction on what subject you love to write if it is about Bhutan and issues are authenticated with facts and sources.

We are eager to hear your comments, suggestions and feedback to improve our future publications. This Journal shall be published once a year, but our website will carry occasional papers, research reports and opinion columns. We welcome short articles/opinions for website too.

Editors

Waters of Bhutan

By Govinda Rizal¹

ABSTRACT

On average 75 billion tons of freshwater exit from Bhutan every year. Freshwater of the Himalayas is used for domestic purposes, to irrigate fields and to generate hydroelectricity among many other uses. Bhutan is perhaps one of the few countries rich in freshwater. The per capita share of freshwater may be one of the highest in the world. A Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) report mentioned that Bhutan's per capita fresh water was 108,476, 557 liters in 2014 – the fifth highest in the world. Yet, the water on each person's share is of little use, as they don't get to use it. The methods and policies used in the past were effective in using water. Due to a shift in peoples' lifestyle and habits, previous system of water management is not enough to meet their future needs. In all cases, water is redirected to rivers or evaporates into atmosphere directly. Here, an academic discussion is carried out on perspective of water use in Bhutan.

Keywords: erosion, fresh water, glacial lakes, hydroelectricity, irrigation, pollution

Introduction

The Himalayas, of which Bhutan is part of, is a natural water condenser that converts water vapor into freshwater. Two factors, high altitude and continuous mountain ranges intercepting monsoon clouds help to complete water cycle. The tall mountains not only convert clouds into water that flows downhill as streams, rivulets, and rivers but also store water in the form of ice for slow release. Himalayan ranges within Bhutan have altitude from 97 m (318 ft) to 7,528 m (24,698 ft) above sea level. The aerial measurement is 305 km from west to east and 145 km from south to north (Dubey, 1978) with an area of 47,000 sqkm (Figure 1). However, approximately 8,500 sqkm is under stake with China and India leaving only 38,500 sqkm in gov-

¹*Beldangi, Jhapa, Nepal*

ernment's diplomatic references (Rizal, 2013). A report on water resources management plan by Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) mentions that an estimated 2,325 cbm/s of water flows out of Bhutan (RGoB, 2007). It accounts to 73,000 million cbm or 73 billion tons of water per year. Water resources include cloud harvest, glacier, glacial lakes, groundwater, lakes, rainwater, rivers, snow, soil moisture springs, streams, water, waterfall, wetlands, etc. All waters from Bhutan flow to India then to Bangladesh and end up in the Bay of Bengal. Clouds from the Bay of Bengal rise and fly to the Himalayas to get condensed into water or ice. Although, small by its area, five large and dozens of minor rivers flow from Bhutan heading to the Bay of Bengal.

Sizes of the rivers depend on the height of the mountains, water catchment areas or sizes of glacial lakes. Some of the major (Ma), medium (Me) and minor (Mi) rivers based on their volume of water and perennial characteristics, located from west to east direction, include, but not limited to, the following: River Jaldhaka (Me); Sibsoo Khola (Mi); Dina Khola (Mi); Sukreti Khola (Mi); Dipu Khola (Mi); Dipojhora Khola (Mi); Chumurchi Khola (Mi); Torsa Nadi (Ma) tributaries include Wang Khola or Amo Chhu (Me), Ha Chhu (Me), Pa Chhu (Me), Wang Chhu (Me) and Thin Chhu (me); River Sunkosh (Ma) tributaries include Po Chhu (Me), Mo Chhu (Me), Dangchhu (Ma) Punatsang Chhu (Ma), Daga Chhu (Me); Sarbang Khola (Mi); Dholpani Khola (Mi); Leopani Khola (Mi); Bhur Khola (Mi); Seti Khare (Mi); Dhaula Khare (Mi); Mao (Aie) Khola; Lalai Khola (Mi); Taklai Khola (Mi);



River Manas (Ma) tributaries include Tongsa Chhu (Mangde Khola); Dangme Chhu (Ma), Lhobrak (Me), Kulong (Me); Panbang Chhu (Mi); Maina Pokhari Khola (Mi); Dalasiri Khola (Mi); Kalanadi (Mi); Bada Khola (Mi); Lokhai Tora Khola (Mi); Samrang Khola (Mi); Jomo Tsangka Chhu (Mi); Galandi Khola (Mi); Bhairav Kunda Khola (Mi); and Dhansiri Khola (Me).

Figure 1. The map of Bhutan showing network of rivers. (Source: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. 1998)

Uses of water

Water is life-sustaining gift of nature and rivers are the venues of civilization. In Bhutan, water-use is prioritised for domestic, agricultural, hydro-power, industrial, and recreational purposes. The natural effects of the water and water-cycle sustain not just human civilisation but the survival of all the living organisms.

Domestic purposes

Water at home is used for drinking, cooking and washing (Figure 2). An increase in the per capita use of water has raised the sanitation standard and improved the general health of people. It's also used for livestock for their drinking and sanitation. Freshwater fisheries and duckeries also use volumes of water as commercial fisheries rise.



Figure 2. A lady collects water from community water-tap.

There is a shortage of water for supply in urban centers and improper distribution in rural areas. People in rural areas have often difficult but more access to drinking water compared to their urban counterparts (Figure 3). Until recent decades, urban hubs had better water supply which was one of the magnets of rural-urban migration. Now the situation is reversing.



Figure 3. A student uses water to fight hot summer.

Cities like Thimphu, Phuentsholing, Gelephu and Samdrup Jongkhar are facing water shortages. Concentration of population, development activities obstructing natural course of water are some of the causes of water shortages in urban centres. The water problems of



Figure 4. A plastic tank used to harvest monsoon water that is used during lean period.

Phuentsholing, or Gelephu are easier to solve. Big rivers flow besides those cities; more water from those rivers can be purified and added to the distribution system. Water in Thinchu river is limited to meet the water needs of Thimphu, the capital city. Water from distant glacial lakes must be drained into Thimphu's water distribution system. It will cost money and time and warrant timely planning. The planners must consider ecological impact downstream of manually draining glacial lakes for city's consumption.

Irrigation

Drought and inadequate irrigation facilities are major factors affecting low yield in agriculture. Fields on mountains are poorly irrigated. They are monsoon dependent. Rain is limited to a few months of the year and land remains barren most time of the year. Focus on mountain irrigation and water harvesting technologies must be made extensive to reach the farmers. Rainfall dependent farming, poor conservation of water sources, drudgery in water collection, low yields from land are pushing factors of out-migration from rural areas, which in turn is leading to labor shortages in agriculture that in vicious cycle lead to the increase in cost of production and price rise. Rainwater harvesting in artificial ponds have started (Figure 4), but they are few and only used as models. They must be made extensive across the country.

Generation of electricity

Bhutan has harvested some benefit from hydroelectricity. Government of India (GoI) has been helping Bhutan in generating hydroelectricity and buying it. Hydroelectricity project harvesting water of river Jhaldhaka, at Jholung is perhaps the first example of a river of Bhutan used for electricity generation. Bridge over the dam connects roads of Bhutan and India. Today more than 76 sites are offered to India to convert water potential to electricity.

Hydropower resources contributed as high as 12% of the GDP in the

2000s (RGoB, 2006). It is estimated that Bhutan has potential to generate up to 30,000 MW of electricity and it has exploited less than 5% of the potential (Dorji, 2016). Even hydroelectricity is not without challenges. When water is channeled to turbines, natural water system is disturbed. Several natural sprouts have dried because their sources were directed or blocked with cemented walls. Of glaring example of is Punatshangchu I project.

In August 2019, heavy monsoon rain drained from mountains above Punatsangchhu river built up debris on artificial lake that burst from the pressure, sending water gushing down steep hillside.

Huge boulders were swept into the flooded zone. Bridges and plants were washed away. As the water joined big Punatsanchhu river, it caused chaos downstream. A block in the river flooded the main highway.

The redirected river swamped an equipment storehouse belonging to one of the contractors of struggling Punatsangchhu-II hydropower project. About US\$110,000 worth of equipment was washed away .

Water-based tourism and recreation

Water-based tourism is attractive and has minimum disturbance on environment and natural water flows. Rafting, kayaking, swimming and canyoning are attractive adventure. Bhutan has not yet tapped this opportunity. Bhutan's rapid rivers are assets for ages. National parks along the rivers avail aesthetic value to people and the environment. They are rare spots for sightseeing. Bhutan has huge potential to make use of the natural resources for this alternative as the major source of national income without having major impact on natural



Figure 5. The supply of clean water is becoming rarer than ever. The scarcity of water is revealing its multi-purposes.

course of the water sources. The country is yet to harvest this potential.

Transportation

Bhutan's water is least used for transportation. It may be difficult for two-way, but they are the best for one-way transportation. The rapid waters of major rivers can be used to transport goods of export like fruits, stones or finished products. They can reduce the transport cost during exports.



Figure 6. The use of bottled water is in increasing trend.

Roads or highways are constructed parallel to a river. Roads constructed on the banks along the water line are shorter than the snaky mountain roads. River thus provide shortest route that connects major cities if they are connected by a river.

Boundaries

Rivers are also used as natural boundaries at national, zonal, district, blocks, villages and farm levels. On the far west of Bhutan is river Jaldhaka, part of it forms the boundary between Bhutan and India.

In the far east the river Dhansiri separates India and Bhutan. Borderlines of most districts pass through rivers, streams or the water-dividing lines along with the mountain ranges.

Challenges

Major challenges posed by fast-flowing rivers, high-altitude lakes and erratic rainfall are soil erosion, landslides, flash floods and destruction of land and properties. Water has become rarer than ever before (Figure 5). Climate change has magnified the adverse effects.

Water quality

There are a few studies conducted and reports published on water

quality. Those few reports are limited to quality assessment of water in urban areas. A report on Physico-chemical and biological parameters carried out at upstream, within the urban area and downstream in and around Thimphu urban area from 2008 to 2009 provides a hint. It showed that as water flowed downwards there was an increase in water alkalinity (pH), electrical conductivity, total dissolved solids, turbidity, nitrate, phosphate, chloride, total coliform, biochemical oxygen demand, but a decrease in dissolved oxygen (Giri and Singh, 2013). Use of bottled drinking water is getting popular in the country for its ease in carrying and quality (Figure 6).

There is a need to carry out extensive evaluation of water quality across the country. The quality of water going to homes and fields must be studied, and necessary precautions taken on time. Testing quality in drinking water supplied to residential area is important to understand the waterborne diseases and their control.

Soil erosion

Bhutan receives heavy rainfall for a few months - June to October. The rest of the year is mostly dry with scanty winter rainfall. Heavy rainfall washes topsoil, causes flood and landslides. On one hand, there are a few systems in place to harvest rainwater for later uses; on another hand loss of fertile topsoil causes poor crop performance. To get a proper yield, farmers are compelled to buy expensive chemical fertilisers. Use of chemical fertiliser has reduced in recent years when the government announced moving to organic farming, yet erosion of topsoil remains the concern for future agricultural yields.

Glacier outburst

Glaciers cover almost 10% of Bhutan's land (Dorji, 2016). Most rivers in Bhutan source their water from glaciers and glacial lakes high up the Himalayas. As many as 2,674 glacial lakes of various sizes have been mapped. At least 24 glacial lakes are potentially dangerous (RGoB, 2006). They are feared to burst at any time. Bhutan was least prepared when such a glacial lake busted in 1994.

On 7 October 1994, Luge Tsho- a glacial lake busted causing a flash flood and a massive landslide in the downstream. The flash flood dumped fishes and aquatic animals on land beyond the riverbanks and took away land, properties, animals and people into the water. *(For details, see Climate Change Impact in Bhutan by I P Adhikari)*

Seasonal variation

Seasonal variation and irregular rainfall across the year have caused

availability of crops for a short time only. Food production is limited to a few months. It has caused fluctuation in food supply and prices. Food imports show an increasing trend. Proper use of free-flowing water, construction of short and long irrigation channels, harvesting for prolong use of rainwater can help alleviate farmers' problems. Cultivation season can be extended, production enhanced, supply and price fluctuation reduced. Ultimate benefit goes to national economy.

Solution to the seasonal variation on availability of water is the use of glacial water and lakes. They slow-release water which flows into rivers. Slow release can be used in fields and for other purposes.

Climate change

Climate change and blame on it has been an easy answer if not a pretext to negligence in conservation practices. Natural major and minor water sources are neglected. When water distribution using pipes started, traditional canals are replaced. Natural reservoirs are no more filled. Urbanisation and cutting down of trees above the water sources have led from temporary to permanent drying of water sprouts (Figure 7). Climate change may be the culprit, but lack of conservation efforts are its catalysts.

Pollution

Pollution as by-product of urbanisation and industrialisation has no brake at sight. They increase together giving a suffocating threat to plant, animal and aquatic lives. Pollution causes several health issues to human, livestock, aquatic lives, plants, animals and environment. It jeopardizes sustainable practices of agriculture, health and environment. Its increase triggers frequency and scale of man-made or natural catastrophes.



Water politics

Bhutan's water-use politics are limited to Bhutan and India. Two governments RGoB and GoI had a sequence of

Figure 7. Climate-change is a culprit that takes a toll on natural water supply. Once a perennial river goes dry in winter.

dialogues on the use of Bhutan's water in favor of Bhutan-India relationship. RGoB had three requests to the GoI that in turn had two. The Bhutanese side proposed the GoI to

- a) Help RGoB keep away its dissidents in exile from reaching Bhutan,
- b) Retain the direct descendants of Trongsa Penlop Ugyen Wangchuk as the guardian to Bhutan's administration and natural resources, and
- c) Develop infrastructure for the use of water resources.

In return, GoI wanted to be the ultimate authority to decide the market and policy for electricity generated from Bhutan; and keep the master switches of hydel projects in India. The discussion took a shape between 2000 and 2009.

- 1) A framework of agreement in 2001 between two governments on cooperation in hydroelectricity sector agreed that GoI built and purchase 5,000 MW of electricity by 2020.
- 2) A Power System Master Plan jointly prepared by experts of the two countries in 2004 estimated the potential of Bhutan to be 30,000 MW with production ability of about 120, 000GWh.
- 3) The Electricity Act was passed during the 79th session of erst-while National Assembly of Bhutan in 2001. Department of Power (DoP) that was under the Ministry of Trade and Industry was restructured. The DoP was divided into three sections, Department of Energy (DoE), Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC) and Bhutan Electricity Authority (BEA) in 2002 (Department of Hydropower and Power System, 2008). The DoE was moved under the Ministry of Economic Affairs, and BEA acts as a liaison institute of GoI in Bhutan. The BPC has the role to contain internal dissatisfaction of the people and stakeholders, and to regulate the system. BPC has an influence on National Environment Commission (NEC) that provides environmental clearance to projects. Its influence also spans the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in regulating its activities to ensure sustainable watershed management. The alignment shows that power sector receives higher priority than agriculture.
- 4) In 2003, Power System Master Plan that classified five types of projects ranging from micro to megaproject schemes, listed 76 projects, 70 on rivers and six on reservoirs with a plan to harvest 23,760 MW before 2022.
- 5) In 2006, Tala Project of capacity 1020 MW was commissioned raising the electricity harvest to 1488 MW.
- 6) On 1 January 2008, three independent hydropower corporations handling Chuka, Basochhu and Kurichhu were merged into one

Druk Green Power Corporation.

7) GoI has agreed to import a total of 10,000 MW from Bhutan by the year 2020. It's expected to raise the revenue for the country.

Water policies

RGoB has shown a significant presence in international front in expressing the concerns of water and environment. Bhutan is signatory to several international legal instruments such as Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal; Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety to the Convention on Biological Diversity; Convention on Biological Diversity; Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITIES); Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; Statute of the Centre for Science and Technology of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries and other Developing Countries; Statutes of the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology; UNESCO World Heritage Convention; International Plant Protection Convention (Adherence); UN Framework Convention on Climate Change; United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (RGoB, 2007), among many other treaties directly or indirectly related to water use and conservation.

However, Bhutan lags in framing national policy specific to water use and conservation. Several policy papers do incorporate those issues. Bhutan Electricity Act, 2001; Environment Assessment Act, 2000; Forest and Nature Conservation Act, 1995; Land Act, 1979; and Municipal Act 1999 are few acts that span the policies on the use of water and policy regulations. The RGoB had developed the country's National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) in 2006.

Conclusion

Water is common property of all organisms on the planet. Everyone must understand it morally, conserve it naturally and use it rationally. All water users and stakeholders must participate to develop National Best Water Use Practice and adhere to it strictly. Bhutan can present itself as the model of best practices in management of water resources. This will supplement Bhutan's much talked environmental conservation practices, globally.

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Bhutan Within the Indo-Pacific Strategies

By C M Niroula¹

ABSTRACT

Security threat posed by rising China in Indo-Pacific region has raised fear of possible shift in the world order – that had remained under tight fist of the United States for over a century. China is flexing its economic and military muscles that is likely to substitute America’s dominance in international politics. As China crawls into Asia Pacific region, the US has unveiled its new strategy to counter the rise of Communist China. Regional allies and stronger security relation are of paramount importance for this strategy to succeed. This paper examines what Indo-Pacific Strategy means for South Asia and Bhutan in particular. How this tiny Himalayan Kingdom would play its role and what are possible advantages? It also includes the role of India in courting Bhutan into the bigger international gambit to surround China and what India and US must do jointly to ensure the success of the strategies.

Key words: communism, democracy, diplomacy, military, politics, strategies, Indo-pacific

Introduction

While unveiling Indo-Pacific Strategies in 2018, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said “American people and the whole world have a stake in the Indo-Pacific’s peace and prosperity. It’s why the Indo-Pacific must be free and open (Hartman, 2019).” US state department describes this statement as ‘an ironclad and enduring commitment’ (US State Department, Office of the Assistant Secretary, 2018) to the region.

The strategy basically targets creating more democratic and open society in Indo-Pacific region to counter China’s undemocratic growing influence. Bhutan is small country but can be a major player under

¹Harrisburg, PA

this flagship strategy within the Indian domain. India's involvement in engaging Bhutan on this strategic initiative of the US government is of paramount importance. The initiative must not ignore the undemocratic behaviours of Bhutan government— past and present.

India is not an alien when it comes to the Bhutanese refugee issue. For decades, a democratic country aligned with an absolute monarchy to curb the voice for democratic change. India remained silent when voices for democratic change rippled southern Bhutan.

We have explicitly observed that current political changes in Bhutan would not have been possible without India's push. India had not been ready to support the anti-establishment forces but in recent decades positioned itself in favour of a democratic governance in Bhutan and in the region.

As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi consolidates his political position within the country and in international stage, Bhutanese in exile can expect a better outcome. His influence would be greater than any previous Indian political leaders. India and Bhutan have repeatedly avowed to keep the bilateral relation as strong as it was, yet PM Modi's challenges remain intact to ensure growing anti-India sentiments in Bhutan would not distract his mission. India's relation with Bhutan will grow stronger at peoples' level and resolution of Bhutanese refugee is a part of this equation. India's relation with Bhutan heavily relies on cultural connection with southern Bhutan. It will glorify image of PM Modi if his government takes steps to resolve the Bhutanese refugee crisis and help Bhutan for stability and peace in long run.

Modi's delivery test

Ram Mandir in Ayodhya remained the critical issue in Indian political gambit. None of the Indian political clans ever attempted to provide a solution to this age-old dispute. PM Modi had thrown himself into the fire ever since he became Chief Minister of Gujrat. It nearly tarnished his image in the western world when he became prime minister in 2014. However, he steered the politics and secured a win for his Hindutva campaign.

Kashmir was another boiling pot of India's internal dispute since independence. PM Modi tactically secured multiple benefit for Kashmir bifurcation. PM Modi managed to provide a solution to conflicting politics of Kashmir that will hopefully bring peace. He technically

opened floodgates for Hindus in Kashmir and politically diminished Pakistan's infiltration into the region.

All these had not been possible without a strong will power and political vision of PM Modi. These few actions he mustered provide hopes that he has courage to do things if he wishes.

Bhutanese refugee issues

I can draw some similarities with PM Modi on my life experiences. Modi came from a background that I had experienced. The tea I drink every morning has a greater connection with PM Modi. I believe he looks back into his young life and his experiences when it comes to addressing problems that common people like me and my fellow countrymen face. I trust he draws lessons from his struggling youth age when he sees the uncertain future of young people still living in refugee camps. As a head of government that has critical role in securing peace and stability in the region, PM Modi bears the onus to address Bhutanese refugee issue. He has the power, efficiency and authority to resolve the crisis. The international community concerned on this issue rely on India as Bhutan's foreign policy is heavily influenced by New Delhi. New Delhi's interest will be Bhutan's too.

There have been several occasions when international rights groups and advocates call for India to take action. India was sharply criticised for ignoring voice of those calling for democratic changes. Balancing act from India was sensitive. Acting against the interest of those in Thimphu would have certainly pushed Bhutan out of India's hand. The refugee leadership had not attained this maturity to address the sensitivity of India's political interest. Additionally, Bhutanese leadership in exile made only futile efforts to engage with the Indian leadership to explain their cause and gain Delhi's confidence.

India may be a major factor in Bhutanese refugee solution, yet Bhutan is the central force. Even then, I would not play a blame game with Bhutan. The rebels of Bhutan (whom RGOB tagged anti-nationals or terrorist) also have made some blunders. These actions would come on table when we talk of a durable and peaceful solution. India had initially provided informal support by ignoring the rebel camps in Garganda. The Bhutanese refugee leadership failed to tap the opportunity and received Delhi's confidence but in some instances engaged in such actions that reflect very undemocratic and inhumane culture.

State party must always take greater responsibility in any wrongdoing,

even if the rebels have made mistakes. When we seek Indian support to resolve refugee imbroglio, the refugee leadership in exile must be standby to accept their mistakes. Solution of the crisis is to forget the past and plan for future. Learn from those mistakes to ensure ethnic tensions would not jeopardise national integrity.

RGOB must spell first its good intentions to take back those remaining in camps and willing to repatriate. The Lhotsampas still in Bhutan have high expectation from their new monarch King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk. These 6500 refugees remaining in camps would disappear in big Bhutanese population. They are certainly not threat to Bhutan's national security. When it comes to solution proposal from RGOB, India is very unlikely to put conditions or reservation. Afterall, it's a matter between Bhutanese citizens and their government.

Bhutan and the strategies

The strategic initiative may be grandeur covering billions in population and geographical area. Countries like India, Australia, Japan may have visible roles yet a small country like Bhutan should not be ignored based on its size. Strategic location of the country means Bhutan may have more important role to play compared to other member countries. South Asia is centrifugal operation base and historical ties between the United States and India make it easy to implement Indo Pacific Strategies in the region.

Bhutan is within the Indian domain. International diplomatic communication with Bhutan is not accessible without Indian approval.

The Indo Pacific Strategies Report (US State Department, 2019) released by Department of State says 'the continuity of our shared strategic vision is uninterrupted despite an increasingly complex security environment. Inter-state strategic competition, defined by geopolitical rivalry between free and repressive world order visions, is the primary concern for US national security. In particular, the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, seeks to reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernisation, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations'.

China's influence in the region is ever increasing along with its economic and military power. Several reports have raised concerns about China's debt trap that smaller developing countries in the region have

fallen into. It is important for the United States and India in the region to make sure that small countries will be able to protect their sovereignty in the long run through development in infrastructures and cross security training programmes.

The new report (US State Department, 2019) of the US Department of State stresses co-operation in additional sectors such as economics, military, technology or energy. The report reads “Asia EDGE and related programmes build on longstanding US energy technical assistance in the region. These programs have mobilised \$806 million in public and private investment across 11 renewable energy projects in Indonesia, including developing its power grid and first wind farm, and helped the Indonesian government integrate energy conservation targets into its 20-year electricity general plan. They have helped increase the capacity for cross-border electricity trade between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Asia EDGE worked with regulators to draft Nepal’s Energy Regulatory Commission Act, which facilitates energy sector regulation. It also supported the adoption of flexible resources, such as gas and batteries, needed to integrate renewables through the US-India Clean Energy Finance Task Force.”

This recent report clearly shows the importance of Bhutan and Nepal in the Indo Pacific planning. Bhutan has opportunity of cashing the benefits of this offer to its economic development by improving its international trade and building infrastructure. Bhutan’s engagement in the initiative also helps to boost its political profile and open doors for expanding its long unfilled dreams of expanding diplomatic relations.

Deputy Secretary of State John J. Sullivan had visited Bhutan in August 2019 to invite Bhutan to actively engage in this bigger international initiative to ensure political balance in the region. Being guided by India on foreign relations, Bhutan is very likely to hold consultation with its southern neighbour on the issue. Foreign Minister Tandin Dorji’s recent visit to India was part of the consultation process. India and Bhutan have increased their engagement in bilateral discussions in recent years to discuss pros and cons of engaging in this bigger political gambit. US has also increased its direct engagement with Bhutan.

The Doklam standoff is one major issue that is telling Bhutan to revisit its strategic stand on national security and sovereignty. China sought to normalise relations (Market Research Journal, not dated) with Bhutan following the event yet the differences continue to re-

main. Bhutan requires stronger military to defend its border encroachment in the north. Modern Bhutanese military in its current incarnation came into existence with Indian support in 1951 following China's absorption of Tibet. Bhutan stood by New Delhi's loss during India China War in 1962 (Dutta, 2017) and inconclusive result of the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War (Vij, 2105) raised question about India's ability to ensure Bhutan's sovereignty. China has not stopped its assertion to claim Bhutan even after absorption of significant area in Gasa district. Doklam push (Philip, 2019) was China's another gamble to undermine Bhutan's sovereignty.

Indo-Pacific strategy give alternative to security in Bhutan's border. The strategies improve India's capacity to counter anti-democratic moves in the region. It strengthens Bhutan borders to some extent. Bhutan will have opportunity to improve and modernise the military facilities, hold defence trainings and strengthen intelligence. Bhutan must walk the talk with India to support Indo-Pacific strategy implementation in the region.

US-Bhutan relation

Bhutan does not have direct diplomatic relation with the United States. 'Although Bhutan and the United States have never established formal diplomatic relations, the two countries maintain warm, informal relations via the US Embassy in New Delhi, India, and Bhutan's Mission to the United Nations in New York. Bhutanese officials and military officers have attended courses at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.'

US is not pushing for a formal diplomatic relation with Bhutan at this stage (Press Trust of India, 2015). And Bhutan had formally announced that it will not have diplomatic relations with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

However, going by the recent developments, Bhutan will immensely benefit from having diplomatic relations with the United States (Ferraro, 2015). Having a formal embassy or at least a consulate in Thimphu will be a great leap forward for Bhutan-US relations. US presence in Bhutan means a greater defence of Bhutan's northern borders from Chinese aggression. India will have a better partner in monitoring ever-increasing Chinese border encroachment. Hopefully, Bhutan and India will not have to see a second Doklam standoff that had challenged the Indian capability in Bhutan.

US diplomatic presence in Bhutan will also help quell the increasing anti-India sentiments in Bhutanese society. US-India joint presence in Bhutan must be for peace and security rather than on meddling in the national political affairs and pushing country into instability.

Concurrently, the Bhutan mission in the New York must also be upgraded into an embassy to deal with bilateral relations with the US. This will improve Bhutan's relation with its Diaspora in the US that has grown big now. A Bhutanese diplomatic mission in Washington will enjoy an added advantage of building relations with its Diaspora and invite them for economic and technological development of the country through monetary and expertise contribution.

IPS and peace in Bhutan

The strategy must facilitate normalising ethnic tensions in Bhutan. Bhutan has remained a multi-ethnic nation for centuries. But it was also marred by several ethnic clashes. Bhutan has kept the situation under control through suppressive measures but failed to indoctrinate the importance of having a peaceful society through dialogue and democratic practices. Despite political changes in the country following abdication by Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuk in 2006, the ethnic cohesion has not improved to facilitate growth and maturity of budding democracy.

IPS includes strengthening democracy. But it should also strengthen inclusive democracy, equality and fair political representation in governance. This will ensure peace, stability, equality and sovereignty of Bhutan and its neighbours.

Conclusion

Indo-Pacific Strategies may have bigger value, geography and wider vision to stop China's influence in the region. Bhutan may be a drop in ocean, yet countries sharing border with China plays vital role in ensuring effective implementation of the initiative. Bhutan has objected to be included in China's most ambitious economic diplomatic push Belt and Road Initiative and this status must continue despite push from the north for greater financial benefits. US's primary vision through IPS may be to stop China from taking over it's role in leading the world political order but there are larger benefits Bhutan can reap from this. US must be ready to address all troubles Bhutan and Bhutanese are currently facing if it wants Bhutan in its allies. India is a

lead in South Asia and biggest strategic partner the US to implement the initiative. Bhutan fits within the Indian arms but remains a very sensitive and important factor for success of the US mega plan.

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Contemporary Bhutan's Faulty Policies and Remedies

Ram Karki¹

ABSTRACT

Bhutan is no exception when it comes to effect of globalisation and its tight measures to avoid the wind of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation will bound to fail sooner if not later. Internet and social media have already been playing their influential role in connecting both former and present Bhutanese citizens. Thus, it is best the Royal Government of Bhutan initiates a friendly policy towards its evicted former citizens whose citizenship of developed countries together with their growing economic prosperity could play a vital role towards promoting Bhutan's economy and image worldwide. This article will try to help open the eyes of Royal Government of Bhutan and its policy makers on issues affecting the country and their possible solution.

Keywords: Bhutanese Diaspora, democracy, human rights, Lhot-sampa, refugees, southern Bhutan, statelessness,

Introduction

The change in monarch has brought some relief to southern Bhutan that has remained on security radar of the government ever since they staged for democratic change in the country in early 1990s. Stories of those evicted were horrible but those who remained in service of the nation did not have good days either.

Southern Bhutanese have started seeking some fundamental changes in the way they are being treated since the reign was taken over by new king in 2008. 'The present King of Bhutan His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has been doing wonderfully well for the welfare of southern Bhutanese community in every field,' said one of

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my Facebook friends from Thimphu on condition of anonymity. He cited the instance of Devi Panchayan Mandir at Kuenselphodrang – built and inaugurated 1 October 2019 under the direct purview of the king on . Hindu Dharma Samudhaya of Bhutan (HDSB), a religious body formed to promote and preserve Hindu Dharma in Bhutan, had proposed construction of the temple that resembled a Buddhist monastery. HSD's intention to please the king was turned down and an Indian company was hired to build the temple in current form (Kuensel, 30 June 2017). This recently inaugurated temple has appearance and resemblance of peculiar Hindu shrines.

My other acquaintance mentioned the new king as a great healer of southern Bhutanese pain. He said the king is making every effort to resolve the long pending issues affecting southern Bhutanese. One such example is providing citizenship to hundreds of Lhotsampas whose citizenship was snatched during 1990s crisis.

King's engagement with southern Bhutanese festival is ever growing reflecting his genuine efforts to get closer to Lhotsampa population. Kuensel reported that His Majesty celebrated Hindu Festival Dasain together with the common people from southern Bhutan in the recently inaugurated temple (Kuensel, 8 October 2019). Traditionally, Kings had invited selected influential individuals from southern Bhutan to receive Tika and blessings in palace during Dasain and Tihar. His latest gestures demonstrates his benevolence specially looking into the fact that even Hindu Kings in Nepal had never travelled to villages to celebrate festival and offer Tika to their citizens.

Democracy in south

The 21 April 2007 is a day to remember in the Bhutanese political history – when a mock election was held in the country to help citizens understand and get accustomed to democratic culture and processes. Despite democratic elections held since December 2007, the political parties and their candidates had many restrictions on what they can do and cannot. Restrictions were either due to lack of adequate legal instruments, same bureaucracy that ran an undemocratic country and self-inflicted fear of being targeted. In the first two elections, candidates were not allowed to campaign in languages other than Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan which is not understood by majority of southern Bhutanese villagers. Since the general election of 2018 we could clearly see perceptible changes in pattern of campaigning and local languages were used during campaigns. Local issues

were discussed with the villagers in their own languages and opinion were sought to resolve long standing issues. President of DNT Dr Lotay Tshering gave several public speeches in Nepali language (NewsClick, 2018) that ultimately turned out to be successful in garnering votes from Nepali speaking population.

While the language in campaign trail has obviously changed, politics of Bhutan and legal provisions have a long way to go before we see changes in what languages can be used in the parliament. If other than Dzongkha languages are allowed for MPs while speaking in parliamentary sessions, Bhutan will a better democracy.

Elected government in Bhutan has been doing better in fulfilling its election promises, though it has to do much more to build the credibility of a vibrant democratic government.

Resolving outstanding issues

There are multiple issues posing challenges for Bhutan to evolve into a real democratic government. Genuinity of democracy in Bhutan rests with the players of Bhutanese politics in readiness to address these challenges and seek practical solutions. Some of these pertaining issues are discussed here.

Bhutanese refugee issue

Bhutanese refugee issue plaguing Bhutan's reputation in the world has gained another dimension after 2008, when the resettlement of refugees in eight developed countries began. More than a hundred thousand refugees have been resettled now and at the moment only around 6,500 are left behind in Nepal. The remaining refugees' only demand is to return to their home country Bhutan with honour and dignity.

The Royal Government of Bhutan has no option other than to accept them – today or in future. Unless these refugees are repatriated with honour and dignity, reputation of Bhutanese government will always be questioned in international forums.

Bhutan has now a democratic government and Nepal has political stability. It's time the two countries must sit on a bilateral talk to resume repatriation process. Nepal has raised this issue several times. It has been learnt that following his visit to Nepal in August 2018 for BIM-STEAC summit, then Chief Advisor/Chief Justice Tshering Wangchuk had advised his monarch to resolve refugee imbroglio at the earliest

possible to build relation with Nepal. During his recent visit to Kathmandu, opposition leader Pema Gyamtsho had informally conveyed Bhutan government's intention to sit for resolving the crisis at the earliest possible that would help build Nepal-Bhutan relations. (*Read Jumpstarting Nepal-Bhutan Relations by John Narayan Parajuli for more on future of Bhutan-Nepal relations*)

Nepalese government may not have political will or diplomatic weightage to put pressure on Bhutan to take back its remaining refugees, but the country will continue to hunt Bhutan for its inhumane action against southern Bhutanese of Nepali origin.

Political prisoners

Since the beginning of democratic movement in 1990, the Bhutan government arrested hundreds of human rights and political activists. The exact numbers, status and whereabouts of those arrested activists has always remained unknown as the government has neither allowed international rights groups to visit prisons nor published their details. Many of these inmates have never seen their families for decades.

In recent years, thanks to social media, families of political prisoners resettled in developed countries could be contacted and credible information about the political prisoners could be assembled. At the moment we could collect details of 40 political prisoners. Many of them are languishing in Chemgang Central Jail serving life sentences for violating country's most notorious element called Tsa Wa Sum under a law 'Thrimzung Chenmo' and for demanding democratic changes in the country. Under this law anyone who speaks against the King, the country and the government are liable to receive a death sentence. Thus, anyone demanding human rights and democracy were put under this category.

Bhutan could win if such political prisoners are released and allowed them to decide their own fate, because the very basic reasons for their arrest are non-existent now. Their basic demand of multiparty democracy and constitutional monarchy has already been met. Moreover, such people are no more threat to the country because once they are released most of them may stay in the country but may prefer to go for family reunion in the resettled countries. ICRC and UNHCR have responsibility to ensure that these prisoners when released would not go stateless and are reunited with their families.

Creating a Diaspora

Many resettled Bhutanese have been generously donating to numerous charities in Nepal. Bhutanese Diaspora has been running their own charities helping Nepal's needy population. One of such prominent charities helping young Nepalese children attend school is Punya Foundation. Krishna Kandel, the CEO of a popular Nepalese TV in several occasions appraised former Bhutanese refugees for their donations to his charities. Be it during Nepal's disastrous earthquake of 2015 or sick individuals, hundreds of thousands of dollars were sent to Nepal by the resettled Bhutanese. Everyday hundreds of resettled Bhutanese travel as tourists to Nepal and spend tens of thousands of dollars. Resettled Bhutanese have already acquired citizenship of the country they are resettled and many have established their businesses, they have prospered and settled well.

Bhutan has the opportunity to tap their financial potential and earn foreign income in the form of tourism and family support. The only way for Bhutan to reap this benefit is by allowing these resettled Bhutanese to travel Bhutan on tourist visa – be it for adventure or seeing family members.

As the naturalised citizens of new countries, the resettled Bhutanese can play a fruitful role of bridging Bhutan and the developed western world. Bhutan could gain tremendously from its former citizens as its goodwill ambassadors. Post settlement, they have taken every opportunity to portray the negative image of Bhutan in the international forums. If their concerns and grievances are addressed, these resettled Bhutanese would turn jewels for Bhutan to propagate the message of peaceful, just and colourful Bhutan. They are very likely to turn into great propagator of Bhutan's national philosophy of Gross National Happiness.

All people love their country of origin and such love can be further cultivated if resettled Bhutanese are allowed to visit Bhutan, where they could visit their family, friends, former schools and birthplaces. This will help boost Bhutan's rural economy substantially. Not to limit the potential of these resettled Bhutanese to pour in dollars into Bhutanese villages in the form of charities to support development activities, social needs and disaster relief management. This in turn will quickly address the growing unemployment. One vivid example is Nepal, that hosted the evicted Bhutanese for 30 years, which received millions from these resettled Bhutanese post 2015 earthquake disaster. Not only dollars but these resettled Bhutanese can contribute



Figure 1: Southern Bhutan will economically benefit from their former residents.

Source: Kuensel

their expertise they acquired if given the opportunities to serve their country of origin.

Resettled Bhutanese if allowed to visit their places of birth will strengthen social harmony and mutual trust between southern and northern Bhutanese within the country and in Diaspora.

Southern Bhutan, that has remained in shadow for decades, will reap the most benefits from these liberal policies. Bhutan will likely see business investments from its former citizens. The proposed Special Economic Zones of Phuentsholing, Samtse (Samchi) and Gelephu will tremendously foster for greater national benefit.

The present Bhutanese leadership have to realise that resettled Bhutanese and a small number of refugees looking for repatriation are not threat to national security – as wrongly perceived by the Thimphu elites. They certainly can be national assets. Resettled Bhutanese are additionally bound by legal provisions of their new countries in terms of their behaviour and activities while travelling overseas on tourist visa.

Bhutan in action

The new Bhutanese leadership must take action to accomplish these targets and ensure Bhutan's future is shaped in a way that would help everyone to forget the past. Let the past not hinder future prosperity of Bhutan.

Bhutan has now onus to resume talks with respective stakeholders to repatriate those Bhutanese refugees in Nepal who are willing to return. It is not a big number yet Bhutan's open heart to welcome this small number will reflect its genuineness towards resolving the crisis.

Bhutan must be ready to open dialogue with the community leaders of those resettled Bhutanese and initiate a communication channel to work towards the formation of a possible Non-Residential Bhutanese Association. Bhutan has by now amply observed the role played by Diaspora in fostering economy in neighbouring countries. Non-resident status will be a one step forward in diversifying Bhutanese economy – which had been the primary objective of DNT election campaign in 2018.

Bhutan must immediately lift visa restrictions imposed on resettled Bhutanese who want to visit their places of birth and see their friends and families. They may be treated as tourists at this stage until such time when it adopts legal instruments to recognise non-resident status and determines the travel criteria. Alternatively, families in southern Bhutan willing to travel to western countries to see their families must be given passports and be allowed to travel freely.

Bhutan and its Diaspora currently lack confidence and mutual trust. It is the onus of the state to initiate confidence building measures that will bring two parties into table to discuss current issues and to plan for future.

Problems in the South

In the aftermath of 1990s crisis, southern Bhutan has been facing series of problems. Despite changes in government and political system, many of these issues are not addressed. They are either not heard of or purposely ignored.

Demographic crisis: Despite resettling people from north and east in the land of southern Bhutanese that were vacant after the eviction of

1990s², majority of such newly resettled people never stayed in the allotted places³. Able bodied southern Bhutanese youths moved to the cities and towns leaving the sparse populations with only the elderly people. Once a very fertile land, it's now left barren for years due to lack of working population in the region. Now, we find only disabled and elderly people living in the villages of southern Bhutan. Such population who were once wealthy and well off are now left with nothing, but only their barren lands and Areca nut orchards as the means of survival. Post 1990s, Indian are forbidden to cultivate lands inside Bhutan otherwise at least such fertile lands could be used.

Environmental crisis: Almost all forests that existed in southern belt

²Notice published on Kuensel date 27 March 1999

Sarpang Dzongkhag

Sardzong/Re-settlement- 9/98-99/2630

ANNOUNCEMENT

All the Shi-Sarps (Re-Settlers) of phase one and two from different Dzongkhags should report to their respective areas under Sarpang Dzongkhag within April 1999. Failure to report within the above dateline, this Dzongkhag Administration would consider the lands to have been surrendered by the Shi- sarps (Re-settlers) to the Government. The concerned Dzongkhags are also requested to kindly inform their respective Shi- sarps (Re-rettlers), to report within the above dateline. For convenience of the Dzongkhag the list of Shi-sarps will be faxed to the individual Dzongkhag within the week.

³Notice published on Kuensel, 20 March 1999.

DZONGKHAG ADMINISTRATION

Tsirang DAT/ADM-27/98-99/

Announcement

Landless people from other Dzongkhag who got land allotment in Tsirang Dzongkhag under resettlement programme have failed to report despite repeated request of the Dzongkhag. Therefore, Tsirang Dzongkhag Administration, once again requests them to report immediately as the cultivation season is already set in. Non-compliance shall be viewed very seriously and Dzongkhag administration shall not be held responsible if any complication arises in future on the matter.

pre-1990 were cleared citing security reasons. One such example is the forest that existed between Nainital and Chengmari in Samtse (Samchi) district, which was once proudly known among villagers as Gokul Tar - it has been completely cleared during early 1990s by Royal Bhutan Army. River Chungpatang flows between these villages. The lands on both side of the river was very fertile for villagers to harvest significant rice and other cash crops annually. Due to government's deforestation initiative, once fertile topsoil has been completely washed away by landslides and change of courses by River Chungpatang. A visitor to this place today will see no bamboo field, or rice field, but only the scars of landslides and soil erosions. Inhabitants of those nearby blocks fear landslides could also wash away their homes in not distant future.

Statelessness crisis: Though the present King in recent years initiated a liberal policy of re-issuing citizenship to some of the people are stateless. A very large number of people who were rendered stateless post 1990 crisis are yet to benefit from the royal mercy. It is estimated some 30,000 to 80,000 (Himal South Asian, 2013) are still living without citizenship in the country. There is every possibility that these stateless people could be evicted from the country.

Conclusion

King's religious initiative to heal the scars of southern Bhutanese, that remained painful for over three decades, could become a step further for national reconciliation and unity. He is the centrifugal force in Bhutan despite political changes. His actions and initiatives will determine if his generosity to help build Devi Pachayan Mandir and celebrate Dasain with southern Bhutanese were genuine kindness or influence of India's Vishwa Hindu Parishad.

Bhutan now has an elected government that has responsibility to address the concerns of its voters. Voters in southern Bhutan have repeatedly raised their voices on why their concerns are not addressed in a democratic Bhutan. At present, the elected government in Thimphu should identify these and many other burning problems of southern Bhutan and should work through its concerned elected representatives for a just resolution. Democracy can only be vibrant and inclusive if it reaches to each citizens and its fruits could be enjoyed by everybody irrespective of their caste, creed, races, colour, sex, region and religion.

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Climate Change Impact in Bhutan

I P Adhikari¹

ABSTRACT

The Himalayas is a serious victim of climate change. Consequences of the change will be the hardest for the people there. Residents in downstream will be no less affected. Melting ice and decreasing ice reserves indicate a disastrous future for those who rely on the Himalayas for water sources. The Himalayas are source of life for millions. Impacts are already visible in the form of flash floods, GLOF and unpredictable monsoon. Results are declining agricultural production, scarcity of water resources and deterioration of human health. Growing vehicular pollution, tourism and mega hydropower dams are some of the internal factors raising alarms in the Himalayas. Moreover, human activities in the vicinity of Bhutan not within its control are bigger influencers of climate changes.

Keywords: Carbon, climate change, glaciers, health, Himalayas rainfall, water, flood

Introduction

Bhutan sits on the southern slope of the Himalayas that is known for serene natural environment and pure air quality. The northern region of Bhutan is covered by snow throughout the year while its southern part is used for human settlement. Southern belt is suitable for agriculture and is the food basket of the country. Hilly region has sparse settlement except for the valleys. The capital Thimphu houses the largest congregation of population. Southern belt with tropical climate is home for a large population.

Quick changes in altitude and monsoon from the Bay of Bengal influence climatic conditions in Bhutan. Temperatures in Himalayan foothills of the southern belt ranges between 15-30 degree Celsius (59-86-degree Fahrenheit). The Inner Himalayas in central region has warm summers and cool and dry winters. This region has temperate and de-

¹Adelaide, Australia

ciduous forests and fruit trees. Greater Himalayas in the far north is extremely cold and is mostly without vegetation.

Climate change

Climate change has become a cliché of our generation. The phenomenon is impacting not just a country but the whole human civilisation. Governments and authorities lack adequate commitments and resources to avert possible disaster of our generation that climate change may be bringing.

There are stark differences in understanding climate change. Political leadership and business tycoons have not yet accepted the idea while scientific research reports project towards natural catastrophe on earth if timely interventions are not made. Younger generation is engaged in this debate expressing concern over its future if current trend on climate change effect is continued. Greta-effect is taking children out of schools to demand that their future remains secure and safe.

Climate change in the Himalayas

According to WWF, over a billion people depend directly on the Himalayas for their survival, with over 500 million people in South Asia, and another 450 million in China completely reliant on the health of this fragile mountain landscape².

Climate change's impact on Himalayan regions is phenomenal. The initial indications are melting glaciers and unpredictable seasonal rainfall. Many Bhutanese settlement downhill depend on Himalayas' freshwater for farming and everyday use. If snow on mountain peaks melts completely this population faces higher incidence of diseases spread by mosquitos and floods, more frequent flash floods, forest fires and landslides.

Climatologists have warned that melting ice in the Himalayas is the sign of unpredicted climate disaster that may impact the entire settlement downstream and that too within our lifetime. The latest satellite pictures showing barren hilltops in Himalayas raise questions what made these ice melt in last few years (Wester et al., 2019). Being a mountainous country Bhutan will bear this brunt.

Result was not due to human activities in the last few years. Glaciers

²Melting Mountains: Climate Change and the Himalayas, WWF, retrieved on 18 Oct 2019 from https://wwf.panda.org/knowledge_hub/where_we_work/eastern_himalaya/threats/climate/

in the Himalayas started melting decades ago because of increased human activities. The rate at which it is melting now will have long-term impact on water, food and energy security in the region. Most significant impact of climate change in Bhutan is the formation of supraglacial lakes due to accelerated retreat of glaciers as a result of increasing temperature³.

The black mountain tops mean threat at the bottom with melted ice joining the glacial lakes to produce Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF). Bhutan has already observed a few instances of this stark reality. Bhutan's most devastating GLOF event was in October 1994 when Luge Tsho burst killing 21 people, damaging 91 houses and 1781 acres of land (NCHM, 2019), killing animals and damaging farms. Of the 2,674 glacial lakes recorded in Bhutan, 24 have been identified by a recent study as candidates for GLOFs soon (Wangda, 2006). The phenomenon is likely to intensify in the coming years as more melted ice join these lakes. If left unchecked, it may wipe out the human settlement in the region in no time.

Bhutan invited international climatologists and environment conservationists following the Luge Tsho disaster. Of many initiatives being underway currently, the biggest one is preventing burst of Lake Thorthormi in Lunana. In 2001, scientists identified Lake Thorthormi as one that threatened imminent and catastrophic collapse. Situation was eventually relieved by carving a water channel from the lip of the lake to relieve water pressure (Leslie, 2013).

Climate change impact in the Himalayas has immensely affected lives in foothills. Unpredictable weather conditions have caused havoc. It has become more difficult to predict and get prepared. The country is also increasingly experiencing prolonged and extreme droughts increasing the risk of loss of biodiversity, forest fires and reduction of crop yield and agricultural productivity.

The heavy rainfall brought about by Cyclone Aila in 2009 in Bhutan incurred loss of US\$ 17 million (NCHW, 2019). The 2016 monsoon was much heavier than usual affecting almost all of Bhutan, especially in the south. Landslides damaged most of the country's major highways and smaller roads. Bridges were washed away, isolating communities. Over 100 families were displaced.

³Climate Change Adaptation, UNDP Bhutan, retrieved from <https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/bhutan>

Carbon Neutral

Bhutan is carbon negative and has committed to remaining carbon neutral. The country has constitutionally committed to have 60% forest cover at all time. These forest are the engines of Bhutan's pleasant climate to this day. In all instances where Bhutan presented its commitment to climate change, the country received international appreciation. The country has many reserves that not only promotes green but wild animals too – protecting bio-diversity.

Today over 70% of Bhutan's land is under forest cover (Pem, 2017). Absorption of carbon dioxide by these forests exceeds the amount of carbon dioxide produced by human activities. However, the country may not be an obvious place to look for lessons on addressing climate change (Dixon, 2015).

A 2013 World Bank report 'Turn Down The Heat: Climate Extremes, Regional Impacts and the Case for Resilience' predicted that even if the warming climate was kept at 2 degrees then this could threaten the lives of millions of people in South Asia. The region's dense urban populations face extreme heat, flooding and diseases and millions of people could be trapped in poverty.

Bhutan declared in 2009 that it would remain carbon neutral and has made the most ambitious pledges on cutting emissions at COP21. But staying neutral as emissions from industry and transport rapidly rise will not be easy. It will require aggressively maintaining its tree cover and finding ways to grow economically in a carbon neutral or reduced way.



Figure 1: Vehicular congestion in Thimphu

Figures show that Bhutan generates only 1.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂), but the forest sequesters far more CO₂ than this. This means they are a net carbon sink for millions of tonnes of CO₂ each year. Additionally, Bhutan exports most of the renewable electricity generated by its fast-flowing rivers to India, driving the country into carbon negative status.

Protected areas are at the core of Bhutan's national carbon neutral strategy. Currently 71% of Bhutan is under forest cover, and more than half the country is protected as national parks, nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries – all connected by networks of biological corridors.

Bhutan utilises its extensive river resources to generate large amounts of renewable hydro energy, propelling the nation to carbon negative status. The government's commitment to environmental protection is further evident in their provision of free electricity to rural farmers, investment in sustainable transport, support for the transition to an entirely and national programs Clean Bhutan and Green Bhutan.

However, challenges are mounting with population growth and increasing use of motor vehicles. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emission from the transport sector could triple by 2030, if actions are not taken, an Asian Development Bank's policy brief warns⁴. Pollutants from the neighbouring India also have negative impact on clear air of Bhutan. Harder days are near for Bhutan to remain carbon neutral and constitutional provision of 60% forest cover as forests depletes to wraths of climate change.

Causes

Too many motor vehicles

The country's second national communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (NEC 2011) in 2011 reported that greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector accounted for about 20% of the country's total emissions in 2000. By the end of 2012, this increased to about 30%.

Vehicle ownership grew by 9.28% in 2018 (MoIC, 2019). The growth was 9.15% in 2017 (MoIC, 2018) and 12.11% in 2016. Of the 100,544⁵ vehicles registered in the country⁶, over 52% are based in Thimphu. That gives us the big picture of why the capital city is growing warmer and polluted. The other industrial city Phuentsholing registers 34% of the vehicle ownership while other districts see very small numbers.

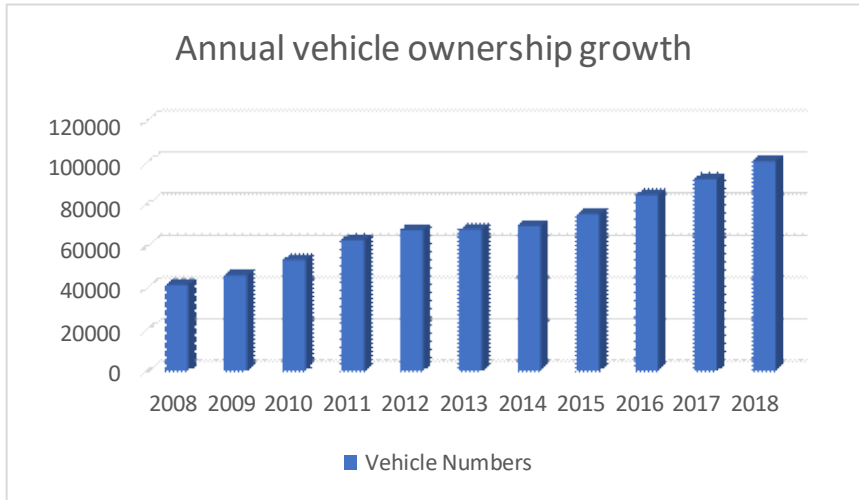
⁴Bhutan Vehicle Emission Reduction Road Map and Strategy, 2017–2025, ADB Briefs, No 110 July 2019. Retrieved in October 2019 from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/513931/adb-brief-110-bhutan-vehicle-emission-reduction-strategy.pdf>

⁵This figure is as of 31 December 2018.

⁶There are 103,814 cars in the country as of July 2019, according to the Second Quarterly Info-Comm and Transport Statistics 2019

Regional towns like Gelephu and Mongar have experienced growth in the last few years even though the numbers are small compared to Thimphu and Phuentsholing. Given the continued growth in vehicle ownership, GHG emissions from the transport sector are expected to grow further in coming years.

Major sources of air pollutants are passenger cars and heavy-duty vehicles, including diesel-powered large and medium-sized trucks and buses. They account for 73% of total vehicles in the country and were responsible for 70 to 90% of local pollutants and nearly 60% of GHG emissions.



Source: Road Safety and Transport Authority, RGOB

Hydropower projects

Bhutan's ambitious project of harnessing 10,000 MW of hydropower by 2020 has raised some serious questions about the impact of dams on country's biodiversity and pristine forests, social life and economy. Most megaprojects are built with large scale reservoir dams ignoring the fact that Bhutan's fast-flowing river system provides opportunity to have run-off-the-river dams. Questions have also been raised about the safety of building so many projects in the fragile mountains of the Himalayas.

Projects like Sunkosh and Punatshangtshu I are already in troubles. The dams and tunnels associated to these projects are likely to cause catastrophic damage to the natural environment. The projects have also become financial burden for the country. The Sankosh Project

will be the most expensive hydropower project at Nu. 115 billion while cost of Punatshangtshu I has escalated from initial assessment of Nu. 40 billion to Nu. 100 billion. The combined cost of two projects is more than current GDP of the country.

Bhutan relies on hydropower sales for economic sustainability. Built with loan from India, the country will face debt trap in case the power productions and water availability are affected by climate change in the Himalayas. Additionally, poor assessment of dam's future impact on ecology, biodiversity and environment may cost bigger for Bhutan in longer run.

Mass tourism

Bhutan has a small tourism industry. The country was open to foreigners only in the recent decades. Several restrictive provisions still discourage many tourists visiting the country.

A total of 274,097 foreign individuals visited Bhutan in 2018 which is an increase of 7.61% over 2017. The number was around 100,000 in 2012. In 2018, international leisure arrivals grew by 1.76% to 63,367 over 2017 while arrivals from the regional market grew by 10.37% (TCB, 2018). However, many of them are regional tourists – mostly from India (70%). In last six years, regional tourists have increased by 400%. In 1974 when the country was formally opened to tourists, Bhutan welcomed only 274 tourists.

With increased arrival numbers, the country has more vehicles plying on the road. Plastics and other litters produced by these tourists are polluting the environment. The serene and quiet environment in temples, monasteries and sacred places is disturbed.

Impacts

Water resources

In 2016, flooding created panic in Thimphu. Phuentsholing-Thimphu highway was hit by flood in several locations. The highway carries food and fuel from India to half of Bhutan. The Kamji Bridge along the highway partially collapsed. The residents of capital city and nearby districts panicked of food and fuel shortages. Overall the floods drove down Bhutan's gross domestic product by 0.36% (Tshering, 2018).

On the other hand, the country is increasingly facing water shortages. Climate change could be contributing to drying up of water sources.

That is why growing cities like Thimphu (Seldon, 2019) and Phuentsholing are running short of water. In the rural areas, people have no water to drink and to irrigate their fields (Kuensel, 2018). Mismanagement of water resources means many wetlands have been destroyed and have disappeared (Wangchen, 2019). In early 2018, several households including Prime Minister's residence in Thimphu had no drinking water supply for several days (Business Bhutan, 2019).

Almost all hotels in Thimphu face water shortage but hotels located in Norzin Lam are affected the most. Hoteliers appealed to the Thimphu thromde several times, but the situation remains same every year (Seldon, 2019).

Water sources in regional areas are also drying up. This is affecting drinking water supply and irrigation.

The government has not yet come up with any credible project on water management and addressing water shortages. It is very likely that land will dry up if interventions are not implemented quickly. This will have greater negative impact on agriculture and food security. When country already relies on import of substantial agricultural product from India, further dependence will derail economic growth. Income from hydropower sale may not suffice to sustain the national economy. (*See Water of Bhutan by Govinda Rizal about Bhutan's water sources and uses*)

Agriculture

Big impacts of climate change are seen in agriculture sector. Bhutan's Labour Force Survey Report 2016 shows 57.20% of Bhutanese depend on agriculture for survival (LMIRD, 2016). Agriculture contributes 16.52% to the national economy, as per National Accounts Statistics 2017 (NSB, 2017). The country has only 2.93% of the land suitable for agricultural cultivation (NSSC, 2011). Farming in hills and terraces have increasingly become challenging and difficult due to extreme weather conditions – as crops and topsoils are washed away and managing irrigation is very difficult.

Increasing temperature in the Himalayas is affecting the ecosystem and thus affecting agricultural productivity. Ecologically, farming in high elevation environments is unsustainable and more challenging due to large fluctuations and weather swings over the altitudinal gradient (Chapin et al 2005).

There is need for Bhutanese to have access to facilities of farming technology and techniques that help agricultural production adapt to and tolerate the changing temperature. Considering shorter monsoon prediction, Bhutan must improve irrigation infrastructures and water management practices. A recent study in Bangladesh revealed that adoption of climate-smart agriculture has improved the food security of the coastal farmers (Hassan et al, 2018).

Weather & natural disaster

Country’s mean temperature and precipitations is on increasing trend (NEC, 2006). It matches the findings of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which reported rising global land and ocean temperature by 0.85°C over the period 1880–2012 (IPCC, 2013).

A simulated projection of temperatures in South Asia shows rising trends in temperature and precipitation in both winter and summer with large anomalies in monsoon (Table 1). This model has predicted the mean summer and winter temperature increases of 2.8 °C and 2.1 °C, respectively, over 2040–2069 (NEC, 2011). ICIMOD says warming has been quicker in higher altitudes (Bajracharya et al, 2017) which ultimately means Bhutan will face wraths of climate change quicker than its low land neighbours.

Unpredictable weather means the country is on red line to face natural calamities from flood, drying water sources and GLOF bursting which we have already discussed above.

Table 1. Bhutan Vs South Asia temperature projection

Parameters	Projections for Bhutan	Projections for South
Annual temperature	Increase by 2.1-2.4°C over 2040-2069	Increase by 1.3-3.5°C in 2100
Summer temperature	Increase by 2.8°C over 2040-2069	Increase by 2°C in 2100
Winter temperature	Increase by 2.10C over 2040-2069	Increase by 2.550C in 2100
Annual precipitation	Increase by 20% over 2040-2069	Decrease by 3%(min) & increase by 39% (max) in 2100
Monsoon precipitation	Increase by 350-450mm/season from 1980 to 2069	Decrease by 7% (min) and increase by 37% (max) in
Winter precipitation	Decrease by 5mm/season from 1980 to 2069	Decrease by 14% (min) and increase by 28% (max) in 2100

Source: Analysis of Historical Climate and Climate Projection for Bhutan, National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology, RGOB

Table 2. Annual & seasonal mean temperature projection under RCP 8.5

RCP 8.5	Mean temperature			Min temperature			Max Temperature		
	2021-2050			2021-2050			2021-2050		
	NHist t °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %	NHist t °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %	NHist t °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %
Annual	11.46	12.92	12.8	5.78	7.34	27	17.13	18.5	8
Jun- Sept	16.58	17.79	7.3	12.33	13.58	10.2	20.8 4	22	5.6
Dec- Feb	4.94	6.68	35.4	-2.08	-0.17	-91.9	11.95	13.54	13.3
Mar- May	11.55	13.02	12.8	5.70	7.25	27.3	17.40	18.8	8
Oct- Nov	10.85	12.39	14.2	4.60	6.28	36.5	17.10	18.5	8.82

Table 3. Annual & seasonal mean temperature projection under Representative Concentration Pathway (RCP) 4.5

RC P 4.5	Mean temperature			Min temperature			Max Temperature		
	2021-2050			2021-2050			2021-2050		
	NHist °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %	NHist °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %	NHist °C	NEX °C	Chan ge %
Annual	11.46	12.69	10.74	5.78	7.10	22.76	17.13	18.28	6.69
Jun- Sep	16.58	17.59	6.06	12.33	13.38	8.57	20.84	21.79	4.57
Dec-	4.94	6.42	30.13	-2.08	-0.46	-	11.95	13.31	11.37
Mar	11.55	12.81	10.88	5.70	7.03	23.28	17.40	18.59	6.82
Oct- Nov	10.85	12.11	11.62	4.60	5.97	29.82	17.10	18.25	6.72

Source: Analysis of Historical Climate and Climate Projection for Bhutan, National Centre for Hydrology and Meteorology, RGOB

Human health

WHO has put impact of climate change on human health into three main categories: (i) direct impacts of for example, drought, heat waves, and flash floods, (ii) indirect effects due to climate-induced economic dislocation, decline, conflict, crop failure, and associated malnutrition and hunger, and (iii) indirect effects due to the spread and aggravated intensity of infectious diseases due to changing environmental conditions (WHO, 2005).

WHO said increase in temperature would spread vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue and water-related diseases such as diarrhoea. Dengue has been observed almost like epidemic in recent years in Bhutan (BNN, 2019).

It is projected that spread of malaria, Bartonellosis, tick-borne diseases and infectious diseases linked to the rate of pathogen replication will all be enhanced. Malaria spreading mosquitoes have recently been observed at high altitudes in the region (Eriksson et al, 2008).

Simple instances such as these suffice the impact of changing climate in Bhutan. In late 80's, early 90's, Thimphu resident never needed cooling. Now, it's become like a requirement – air conditioning and ceiling fans have become necessity in the capital city. The snowfall has become unpredictable.

Preventive measures

Bhutan and the neighbouring countries in the Himalayas must come up with practical approaches to address ever-increasing negative impact of climate change in the region. Because the impact on Himalayas is observed to be much faster than lower altitude, it is an urgency for the country to think seriously how the impact can be reduced.

ADB has recommended to upgrade fuel quality testing procedures, vehicle emission standards and revise its standard from Euro 2 to Euro 6. It also recommended to restrict diesel cars and light duty vehicles⁷.

“It would also be necessary for Bhutan to improve its regulations, strengthen enforcement, and enhance the testing procedures and execution to minimize errors and prevent high-emitting vehicles from passing the vehicle emission inspection test,” the report stated.

⁷Bhutan Vehicle Emission Reduction Road Map and Strategy, 2017–2025, ADB Briefs, No 110 July 2019. Retrieved October 2019: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/513931/adb-brief-110-bhutan-vehicle-emission-reduction-strategy.pdf>

In Bhutan, diesel vehicles comprise only 40% of the total number of vehicles in use, yet they are the largest polluters, contributing 98% of PM, 95% of nitrogen dioxide, and 87% of sulphur dioxide emissions in the country.

Another suggestion is to promote low-carbon vehicles like Hybrid, plug-in hybrid, and electric cars. The government's plans to tap international climate finance could go well with low-carbon commercial vehicle strategy, favouring electric mobility and focusing on taxis, buses, and urban freight vehicles.

The first elected government led by Jigmi Yosher Thinley had made efforts to put restriction on number of vehicles being imported. The attempt was crushed. Tobgay government in 2017 withdrew from the free vehicular movement agreement among Bhutan, Bangladesh, Indian and Nepal. The newly elected government in 2018 said it will relook into the agreement but has not given priority. Bhutan must formally withdraw from the agreement if the country is serious about reducing pollution.

Despite ADB recommendations, Bhutan's diesel consumption and vehicle imports continue to increase posing threat to Bhutan's status of a carbon neutral country (Dema, 2019). Cities are already feeling the pressure to accommodate ever increasing vehicle numbers (Wangmo, 2019).

Bhutan stepped up its response to climate change with the launch of a project to advance its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) focused on water. The project, to be implemented with the support of the UNDP, benefits from a US\$ 2.7 million grant from the Green Climate Fund, a fund created under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to support the efforts of developing countries to respond to the challenges of climate change (UNDP, 2019).

In an effort to resolve water scarcity and reduce human wildlife conflicts, Tarayana Foundation operates 'Developing climate resilient communities through appropriate adaptation and mitigation interventions' in 15 villages of five districts - Lhuentse, Mongar, Sarpang (Sarbhong), Samtse (Samchi), and Haa. The project supplements the NAP.

The project supports interventions such as community mobilisation,

training on watershed and land management, clearing of water sources, plantation of suitable plants around water sources to recharge the water table, installation of rain water harvesting tanks, and construction of water reservoir tanks would be undertaken.

Ugyen Wangchuck Institute of Conservation and Environment (UWICE) runs Himalayan Environmental Rhythms Observation and Evaluation System (HEROES) project in close collaboration with schools and nature clubs across the country. The project employs a combination of weather data collection and citizen science to help understand climate change. Project encourages hundreds of students to actively engage in observing their immediate environment to detect changes in how plants and wildlife respond to climate change. Some 34 teachers and 340 students have been trained and are now participating in the project⁸.

With the effects of climate change intensifying, the frequency of significant hydro-meteorological hazards are expected to increase. To that end, Bhutan is partnering with development institutions including the World Bank, to strengthen its hydrological and meteorological services and better preparedness for disasters⁹.

The project will pioneer flood forecasting and weather advisories to help farmers increase their crop yields—a first in Bhutan—and enhance weather forecasting and disaster management.

Bhutan made the world's most far-reaching climate promise to the Paris climate summit, a climate research group says¹⁰. The group appreciated Bhutan's efforts to keep the country green and highlighted Bhutan's world record on planting new trees – nearly 50,000 trees were planted in an hour in 2014.

Conclusion

The efforts must continue to keep alive Bhutan's serene ecology and air quality. Efforts within the country to act swiftly on vehicular pollution, managed tourism programmes and efficient use of water re-

⁸Understanding Climate Change in Bhutan. Bhutan Foundation. Retrieved in October 2019 from <https://bhutanfound.org/projects/understanding-climate-change-in-bhutan>

⁹South Asia Hydrology Forum Report. World Bank. Retrieved in October 2019 from <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/194171554125112686/SAFH-Report-final.pdf>

¹⁰ECIU Comparator Tool reveals surprising results, Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit, 03 December 2015. Retrieved in October 2019 from <https://eciu.net/news-and-events/press-releases/2015/comparator-tool>

sources are some of the steps Bhutan must take at its discretion whereas there is more to do in collaboration with neighbouring countries like China, India, Bangladesh and Nepal in designing programmes to minimise climate change impact on the Himalayas.

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Jumpstarting Nepal-Bhutan Relationship

By John Narayan Parajuli¹

ABSTRACT

A breakthrough in Nepal-Bhutan relationship in the past had been rendered near impossible given the mistrust over refugee issue coupled with lack of autonomy in Thimpu vis-à-vis conduct of its foreign and defence policy. With resettlement of most Bhutanese refugees in third-countries and revision of Bhutan-India Friendship Treaty 1949, there is tremendous scope for strong bilaterally beneficial relationship now. But this will only gain meaningful traction by addressing the refugee saga in some manner. Since only a handful of refugees remain in camps now, Bhutan can offer to repatriate the remaining refugees under the same process agreed during Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) meetings and Joint Verification Team (JVT) mechanism without any significant costs. At this stage this may symbolic at best, but will help provide a closure to all parties involved: Nepal can declare success in its bilateral diplomatic dealings; it will help Bhutan salvage its reputation in international forums while further cementing its autonomy in the conduct of its foreign policy; and this will also help close a painful chapter for thousands of Bhutanese refugees who have now become citizens of some other countries.

Keywords: Bhutan; diplomacy, Nepal; refugees, relationship;

Introduction

There are many similarities between Nepal and Bhutan. Both countries straddle the Himalayas and are landlocked—surrounded by India and China. The two countries have huge hydropotentials and can be energy powerhouse of the region. Both the countries are members of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and founding members of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) (Bhattarai, 2019). The two countries have joined Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi

¹Imadol, Lalitpur, Nepal

-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) since 2004 (BIMSTEC, 2019). Historically, the two countries have been friends. Even as Nepal began experimenting democratic rule since the 1950s, it was not until early 90s that Bhutan transitioned to some semblance of democracy. Bhutan is home to a sizeable population of Nepali origin—with records of migration dating back as far back as early 17th century (Dhakal, 2003).

The current state of Nepal Bhutan relationship can be best described as lukewarm. “Ties are neither cordial nor strained,” a Nepali foreign minister put it curtly (Bhattarai, 2019). Even as both countries have shared interests, no serious efforts have been made from both sides to increase engagement. The two sides are working towards finalizing a trade deal that would see mutual preferential treatment for goods, but progress has been very slow. Historically both countries had very close ties. Though there are claims that ties began as early as sixth century AD, recorded events show relationship dating back to early 17th century (Dhakal, 2003).

After the emergence of a unified Bhutan in 1625, the first Dharmaraja Shabdrung Nawang Namgyal is said to have visited Kathmandu valley and during his return to Bhutan was accompanied by 40-50 Gorkha and Newari families. The Gorkhali migrant contingent led by Bisan Thapa Magar included Brahmins, Chhetriyas, Vaishya and Sudras (Dhakal, 2003). This could have been the beginning of migration of Nepali population into Bhutan.

Modern relationship

The two countries established modern diplomatic relations in 1983 despite monarchies of the two countries developing ties three century earlier (Dhakal, 2003). Neither Nepal nor Bhutan have opened embassies in each other’s country. The ambassadors in New Delhi have been mutually accredited as non-resident representatives. Soon after the diplomatic relationships were established, a very sore point in the bilateral relationship emerged: the issue of Bhutanese refugees.

Beginning in late 1980s Bhutan saw protests for democratic rights from the minority Lhotshampa community, who were of Nepali origin. This led to crackdown and subsequently, Thimphu began expelling these communities *en masse*. By the early 1990s, thousands had been picked by Indian security forces from Indo-Bhutan border and then left at Indo-Nepal border in the east. Nepal opened doors for these refugees—who at their peak numbered over 117,000. After the

process of third-country resettlement began in 2007, less than 6,500 refugees remain in the camps in eastern Nepal

As Nepal is not a party to the UN refugee convention and protocol, it had rejected the idea of local assimilation in the past. Kathmandu wants to resume negotiations with Thimphu stalled, since 2003, to repatriate the remaining refugees (D'Ambrogio et al, 2019).

Tale of Bhutanese refugees

There was a build up to the expulsion of Lhotsampas. A law passed in 1985 and subsequent census made the determination that thousands of Nepali speaking persons were not citizens of Bhutan given that they could not provide proof of residence in 1958. The cut-off date was repeated by 'poorly trained census officials' in subsequent census in 1988-89 (Morch, 2016). Those unable to provide the proof were labelled as illegal immigrants and then expelled (United States Department of State, 2018). The two subsequent censuses made officials in Thimphu aware of the size of the Nepali speaking population living within the territory of the Bhutan. After the census, officials estimated figure of Lhotshampas at 28% but informal estimate that circulated spoke of up to 40% (Morch, 2016). This clearly influenced the imagination of majority Drukpa population and officials. This came very close to the annexation of Sikkim by India in 1975. Ever since the concern in other two remaining Himalayan States, Nepal and Bhutan have been to avoid similar fate. The reaction to Sikkim incident has been very similar in both Bhutan and Nepal: promotion of single national identity fashioned on the image of dominant group.

Perhaps this is the reason why Bhutan was never keen on repatriating the refugees; while under international pressure it agreed to a bilateral process, but its intent was very clear from the beginning. The Nepal-Bhutan Ministerial Joint Committee (MJC) had held 15 meetings to resolve refugee issue. A Joint Verification Team (JVT) was formed to verify the refugees into four categories and eventually to repatriate them. The JVT was tasked to categorise and verify the refugees into four groups: i) Bonafide Bhutanese who were forcibly evicted, ii) Bhutanese who emigrated, iii) Non-Bhutanese, and iv) Bhutanese with criminal background (Human Rights Watch, 2007).

The JVT had completed its process in Khundunabari Camp. In its' 15th meeting held in Thimphu on 20-23 October 2003, MJC had agreed to repatriate the refugees failing under categories 1, 2 and 4 while assigning the JVT to review the appeals submitted by those falling in catego-

ry 3. The meeting had also agreed to assign the JVT conduct the process of categorisation and verification in Sanisshare Camp. But a security incident in Khudunabari Camp on 22 December 2003 stalled the process (Nepal: Foreign Policy and Government Guide, 2009). There have been repeated verbal agreements to resume the process even at the prime ministerial level, but with no forward movement on the ground.

Current relations

Despite the size asymmetry, the two countries have much in common. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Federation of Nepalese Chamber of Commerce and Industries and Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry to promote trade and economic relations between the two countries in March 2005 (Bhattarai, 2019). Subsequently, the first meeting of Nepal-Bhutan Bilateral Trade at the level of Joint Secretaries of the Ministries of Commerce was held in Kathmandu on 17 March 2010 and the second meeting in Thimpu on 24-25 May 2011 to discuss the Draft Agreement on Bilateral Trade (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal, 2019).

The two sides are close to finalising a trade deal that would see preferential treatment for goods from each other's country. A closer cooperation would be a win-win situation for both countries. A draft agreement has been finalised in August 2019. As the draft of bilateral agreement requires approval from Bhutanese parliament, the date for signing of the agreement has not been fixed so far. In 2018 and 2019, Nepal imported goods worth NPR 1.6 billion from Bhutan (The Himalayan Times, 29 August 2019). Nepal's exports include sculptures and statuary, electric transformers, soaps, garments and footwear. Major imports from Bhutan include gypsum, coal and cement. "Even though the balance of trade has traditionally been in Nepal's favor, Nepal has sustained trade deficit in recent years" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal, 2019).

Nepal is a major tourism destination for Bhutanese and their numbers are increasing. Between 2016 and 2017 the number of Bhutanese arrivals jumped from 6,595 to 10,923 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal, 2019). Historically Nepal has been a major pilgrimage as well as shopping destination. After the 2015 earthquake, Bhutan rushed to aid Nepal by contributing US\$1million to relief fund while deploying a 78-member relief team (Bhattarai, 2019).

Way forward

Nepal has shown considerable interest in developing a mutually beneficial relationship with Bhutan, but refugee issue coupled with lack of autonomy in Thimphu vis-à-vis conduct of foreign and defence policy made it difficult for the two sides to make a breakthrough. Bhutan had been a protectorate of British India (Mahajan, 2018) and that special relationship continued even with independent India under the 1949 treaty when it came to foreign and defence policy. But a revision to the treaty in March 2007 gave Bhutan autonomy in conduct of its foreign and defence policies (Mahajan, 2018). The revision substantially changed Article 2 of the 1949 treaty removing any reference to ‘Indian guidance’ on the conduct of Thimphu’s external affairs. Instead the updated version of the treaty emphasises closer cooperation.

Even as Bhutan wants to diversify its relations, its economic overreliance on India makes it near impossible for it to take any drastic measures. “Beside receipt of budgetary support, Bhutan’s trade with India accounts for 85% of the total trade volume. Based on the national statistical figures, presently, about 80% of the Bhutanese import comes from India and 95% of total exports goes to India” (Kharka, 2018). Bhutanese currency is arbitrarily pegged at parity with Indian currency. In addition, ‘all most all the hydropower projects in Bhutan, the primary export, are financed by India. Nearly one quarter of the Bhutan’s government expenditure is financed through Indian grants or about 10 percent of the GDP (Kharka, 2018).

While strong direct collaboration may still be under the shadow of refugee saga and India factor, cooperation through multilateral forums is the emerging norm. As India seeks to avoid sharing a platform with Pakistan, SAARC is effectively on animated suspension. Bangladesh Bhutan India and Nepal (BBIN) and BIMSTEC are emerging as new platforms of cooperation at the sub and super-regional levels. In bilateral areas, there is tremendous scope for technical collaborations and joint ventures at the public and private level. Rijal Tashi Industries is an example of technical collaboration between Nepalese and Bhutanese private sectors. There is a need for more business to business and people to people diplomacy. Despite the size of the country Bhutan is an important contributor to Nepal’s tourism revenues.

So far these gains in bilateral relationship have been as a result circumstantial action. Both countries need to take proactive actions to jumpstart the stalled relations. This can begin through a high-level exchange and subsequent establishment of permanent bilateral ministerial level mechanism to review and push forward ideas and avenues of bilateral cooperation. Geopolitics in the region is rapidly changing as United States, China and India are tangled in a complicated phase of conflict and cooperation. Traditional understanding of 'spheres of influence' is rapidly evolving as technology, globalization, market forces and interplay between the three continue to produce complex scenarios. It is in the interest of medium sized and smaller states to collaborate to have their collective interests represented as big powers shape and reshape the global order.

As Bhutan seeks to exercise relatively independent foreign policy, it can do so by building an alliance with like-minded states like Nepal. But this will only gain meaningful traction by addressing the refugee saga in some manner. Since only a handful remain in camps now, Bhutan can offer to repatriate the remaining refugees under the same process agreed during JMC meetings and JVT mechanism. This will be a tokenism at best, from Nepal's point of view too, one of the biggest fiascos in its diplomacy, can have some dignified closure. Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli, during his first tenure as Prime Minister in 2015-16 had offered to locally assimilate the remaining refugees. Even if Bhutan accepts a handful as a goodwill gesture, there is political will in Nepal to have the rest locally resettled—permanently closing the camps. It will also help Bhutan salvage some reputation in the international forums. By agreeing to four verification categories during the joint ministerial meeting Bhutan has already accepted that some Bonafide Bhutanese may have been forcibly removed. Not just for states involved, this will also help close a chapter for thousands of Bhutanese refugees who have now become citizens of some other countries.

Bhutan can also benefit from these Diaspora communities, who may be Nepali speaking, but are Bhutanese at heart, nonetheless. The expertise they have acquired in last 12 years as residents and citizens of developed western countries can be used in the development process of the country. In addition, Thimpu can also tap into potential the remittance as many have family and friends in Bhutan. The remittances from over 100,000 Bhutanese refugees settled in developed countries can have sizeable impact on the economy.

Conclusion

Since the early 90s Nepal-Bhutan relations have been under the cloud of refugee saga – created due to eviction of Nepali speaking citizens from Bhutan. But that seems to be changing as interactions between the two sides increase. The two sides are close to finalising a trade deal that would see preferential treatment for goods from each other's country. A much closer cooperation would be a win-win situation for both countries, yet breakdown of negotiations on repatriating Bhutanese refugees in 2003 continue to perpetuate an environment of mistrust between Kathmandu and Thimphu. Now that only a handful of refugees remain in the camps in eastern Nepal, it is imperative that both sides find a solution. This may be symbolic at best, yet it would remove a major barrier to fuller cooperation. An exchange of high-level visit coupled with establishment of ministerial level mechanism can help jumpstart the relationship.

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