

Girls Unsafe

Status of Human Rights in Bhutan 2021

The Bhutan Watch

STATUS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN BHUTAN 2021

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ACRONYMS

BBP	Build Bhutan Project
BBS	Bhutan Broadcasting Service
BCCI	Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry
BDBL	Bhutan Development Bank Limited
BEO	Bhutan Employment Overseas
BPC	Bhutan Power Corporation
BRCs	Bhutan Red Cross Society
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRO	Commission for Religious Organisations
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCT	Druk Chirwang Tshogpa
DNT	Druk Nyamrup Tshogpa
DPT	Druk Phuensum Tshogpa
DPO	Disabled People's Organisation
ECB	Election Commission of Bhutan
ECCD	Early Childhood Care and Development
EVM	Electronic Voting Machine
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
ICRC	International Red Cross Committee

ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
JAB	Journalist Association of Bhutan
JDWNRH	Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital
LEP	Learn and Earn Programme
LG	Local Government
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
LS	Lower Secondary
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoLHR	Ministry of Labour and Human Resources
MQS	Minimum Qualification Score
NCWC	National Commission for Women and Children
NDPSS	Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Substance Abuse
OAG	Office of the Attorney General
OAP	Open Air Prison
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDP	People's Democratic Party
RBA	Royal Bhutan Army
RBP	Royal Bhutan Police
RBG	Royal Bodyguard
RCSC	Royal Civil Service Commission
RENEW	Respect Educate Nurture Empower Women
RICBL	Royal Insurance Corporation of Bhutan Limited
RUB	Royal University of Bhutan
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund

FORWARD

The human rights situation in Bhutan is back to its pre-1990 silenced normalcy. The Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) after the successful eviction of its political opponents assisted by the Indian and other international governments, is back to its usual business of concealing the truth and realities of excessive abuses and passing the government's version of serene peace and silence to the world outside. The issues of political prisoners no more make appearances in the HR reports of international organisations and governments, or the international forums.

The onus to repatriate its evicted Bhutanese citizens living in refugee camps and exile is taken away from the RGoB. International Red Cross Society (ICRC) that used to visit political prisoners and facilitate communication with their family members and the UNHCR that used to assist the refugees in the Bhutanese refugee camps in Nepal have fled from their responsibilities, thus providing relief to the RGoB. The RGoB relieved from all its wrongdoing, appreciated with honors and awards is back to its autocratic totalitarian stateliness.

The family members separated for decades are tiredly waiting for a reunion. The RGoB has been dumping appeals and requests for a reunion as unnecessary.

The government has sealed the border with India indefinitely and the border guards decide who can cross the border and for how long. The costs of buying imported goods have soared and the selling price of local produces has plunged to a minimum. The RGoB has let loose Desuung- the orange army formed to round up civilians in the guise of defense personnel continuing their vigilante duties.

Many government officers are dragged to court on personal grudges, charged with violation of the unbailable National Security Act- 1992, and put behind bars for decades.

The king has formed a military cum vocational training and has made it mandatory for the unemployed and out-of-college youth.

In the decade of 1990, the RGoB had introduced two Dzongkha examinations in the Royal Civil Service Commission to prevent the youths from non-Dzongkha speaking communities from entering the bureaucracy. Thirty years later, many children from non-Dzongkha speaking communities have sharpened their abilities in Dzongkha and have become competent to pass the multiple Dzongkha examination. Instead of welcoming new talents from diverse communities into bureaucracy, the RGoB has introduced a morale examination to filter talents from such communities from joining the policy-driving body of the country.

The judiciary has neither the respect it deserves as government media brings out crafted personal affairs of the judges to the public and defames them, nor is its verdict considered final and binding if that verdict is against the chosen people.

Common peoples' economic standing has deteriorated, triggered by the pandemic and the government imposed excessive restrictions under the pretext of preventing the spread of the disease.

There are periodic elections, but the higher authorities depute those candidates. They sideline volunteer candidates by declining their security clearances or by labeling them with allegations. Only people who have received royal favours can form and lead political parties- an effective method through which they control the political parties.

The members of royal families lead all social and rights organisations in the country that are supposed to campaign for rights and justice. Their existence has little benefit to the common citizens.

All media are under the Royal Media Foundation which determines their freedom of expression, content, subsidies and share over advertisements. The freedom of speech and expression exists only in the golden words in the Constitution of Bhutan 2008.

The organisations campaigning for the rights and welfare even operating from exile are no more extant.

In this dark age of human rights violation, when the RGoB tightly seals realities and shares the government's versions of clean records internationally, *The Bhutan Watch* has come forward, picked up the issue, and drilled peepholes to view at the alarming human rights violations inside the country. This issue, like the past, deserves sincere encouragement and support from all the rights and justice respecting individuals, organisations, and forums across the world.

May this endeavor of The Bhutan Watch help snowball support for:

- The immediate release of all the political prisoners from jails in Bhutan and their rehabilitation in their original homes.
- The restoration of government-revoked citizenship identity cards to the people living in the country.
- The end of gender-based violence and pave a way to end all forms of discriminations
- Early repatriation of the Bhutanese refugees and their children from the refugee camps in Nepal and from exile, and recognition of the political parties functioning in exile for contesting elections there.
- The reunion of the separated family members and the creation of an environment for harmonious coexistence among and between the people within Bhutan and the world.

Thank you
Dr Govinda Rizal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A high-profile case involving the supreme court justice dominated the news outlets of the country for majority of the year. The personal collusion between a lady and army chief was tagged as mutiny and criminal conspiracy. Where females are treated as incompetent compared to their male counterparts, sentencing a lady on charge of mutiny is contentious.

On the political front, the governing party DNT has gradually cornered the opposition DPT with likely intention to kill it by next election, scheduled for 2023. Since anti-king sentiments outpoured at the party's gathering after 2013 election, the palace has taken calculated steps to finish DPT at any costs. Other parties have become the instruments.

Political participation of women and other minority communities remain very low due to lack of government initiatives for positive outcomes.

Women and girl children continue to face the wrath of masculinity – sexual abuses and rapes. Safety of girls is at risk. There are no government interventions despite the seriousness of the issue. Safety of women and girls is not the priority of any successive governments. The solution is focused on jail term for perpetrators where possible – rather than seeking long term solution through women empowerment and social awareness through education.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed the economy to the brink. Unless any revolutionary programmes are launched, the economy is likely to take years to repair. The government-imposed restriction challenged the general life and treating citizens like criminals for minor violation of orders has questioned the very tenets of a humanity in Bhutan.

Unemployment has increased. Failure of the government to create employment opportunities provided good grounds for the palace to take advantage and present itself as the rescuer of unemployed new generation. The initiative from the palace 'Gyalsung' has overtaken the constitutional

mandate of an elected government. It may create some jobs, but it will undermine the authenticity of the elected government, question the ceremonial role of monarchy and ultimately people's faith on democracy. If the intention was pure and sincere, the the palace could have operated such a programme within the purview of the government and strengthen the democratic values.

This report covers the incidents between 1 January and 31 December of 2021.

POLITICAL FREEDOM

The country remained fairly calm and quiet on political activities during the reporting period. The pandemic further squeezed political activities and events. As usual there were not such political violence to report – internal or external influence.

The country was rocked by the unrevealing of the ‘criminal conspiracy’ case involving the sitting Supreme Court Justice Kuenlay Tshering, former Royal Bodyguard (RBG) Commandant Brigadier Thinley Tobgay, Pemagatshel District Judge Yeshey Dorji and Bomden Khandu Wangmo in an alleged plot to overthrow the army chief Batoo Tshering¹. The event had no direct involvement of the political groups or parties, yet the severity of the event has closer connection to political fronts and security of the country. Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) arrested all of them on 16 February 2021. Bail was denied and a case against them was filed at the Thimphu District Court on 17 February². The court took the proceedings in silence and convicted them with sentences ranging from 5 to 21 years. Wangmo was given maximum sentences for seditions charges³. The verdict was challenged at the Supreme Court, but it upheld the lower court’s judgments. There were many gray areas in whole investigations procedure and court proceedings. The public disseminations of the cases were one-sided⁴. Media access was limited, and full verdict documents were not publicly scrutinised. There were limited legal representation on behalf of the convicts. The event was portrayed as betrayal to the nation and those convicted to be criminal. However, closer observation reveals otherwise. The event was the result of personal grudges between Royal Bhutan Army (RBA) Chief Tshering and Wangmo⁵. Other individuals were dragged in. The ramification of the event went beyond the individuals allegedly involved. Deputy Chief of RBP for Crime and

¹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/oag-files-23-charges-against-four-defendants-involved-in-the-criminal-conspiracy-case/>

² <http://www.bhutanwatch.org/mutiny-or-personal-collusion/>

³ <https://thebhutanese.bt/the-story-of-khandu-wangmos-victims-in-the-sedition-case/>

⁴ <https://thebhutanese.bt/opening-statement-of-khandu-wangmo-not-accessible-to-the-press/>

⁵ <http://www.bhutanwatch.org/mutiny-or-personal-collusion/>

Operations Colonel Dorji Wangchuk was terminated⁶ from service on charges that he had links with Wangmo, with benefits in June. He allegedly helped Wangmo in destroying evidence.

The country conducted two bye-elections for the National Assembly. Bye-elections in Mongar (Mongar district) and Nganglam (Pemagatshel district) constituencies were held on 29 June. The former home minister Sherub Gyeltshen, the MP from Mongar constituency, resigned on 6 May after the Supreme Court upheld lower court verdict of his ‘criminal act’⁷. He remained stubborn to defend this case of false insurance claim despite being convicted by three courts – district court, high court and supreme court⁸, but ultimately resigned when public criticism grew. The former Nganglam MP Choida Jamtsho died due to food poison on 18 April. The ruling party, DNT won both elections. Karma Lhamo of the DNT received 4,149 votes in the Mongar defeating Dorji Yuden of DPT, who received 2,035 votes. Karma Dorji won Nganglam with 2,951 votes, defeating Rinchen Pelzang of DPT who received 2,285 votes⁹. There were few reported breaches of electoral laws. A video DNT promoted on social media was circulated without ECB consents. Media arbitrator¹⁰ had ordered the removal of the video and the party was warned for the action.

Labour and Human Resource Minister Ugyen Dorji was appointed as new home minister and Nganglam MP Karma Dorji was picked up as new labour minister. However, cabinet reshuffle angered many DNT party members¹¹. Dorji’s pick was a political message to the voters to influence their decision in future. Nanglam was regarded as the stronghold of DPT. Win in

⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/deputy-chief-of-police-crime-terminated-with-benefits/>

⁷ <https://thebhutanese.bt/after-three-convictions-and-no-hope-home-minister-quits/>

⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/supreme-court-convicts-dasho-sherub-gyeltshen-and-five-others-in-insurance-fraud-case/>

⁹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/mp-elects-of-mongar-and-nganglam-to-concentrate-on-completing-pledges/>

¹⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/media-arbitrator-makes-dnt-remove-campaign-videos-from-social-media/>

¹¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/ruling-party-members-unhappy-with-labour-minister-selection/>

Namglam was a step further in eliminating DPT from Bhutanese political landscape while Dorji's pick for ministry was to strengthen the position.

Police detained DPT MP from Khamdang-Ramjar constituency (Trashiyangtse district) Kuenga Loday¹² on 1 March for an alleged illegal road construction in this village. An assistant head of the village assembly (Mangmi) and his three sons were also briefly detained in connection to the event. They were convicted for construction of a road in a protected area. The MP was sentenced¹³ to five years in prison by the Trashiyangtse District Court on 14 August. He resigned from National Assembly on 15 November¹⁴.

Bhutan completed its third Local Government (LG) election on 22 December in 205 blocks of the 20 districts, 14 sub-municipalities and Samdrup Jongkhar municipality. A total of 3,500 candidates contested the elections. A total of 1,437 (1,252 male and 185 female) were elected. There were 463,033 (226,202 male & 236,831 female) registered voters of which 316,798 (153,084 male & 163,714 female) exercised their adult franchise. Of them 190,494 (89,934 male & 100,560 female) voted through EVM and 126,304 (63,150 male & 63,154 female) voted through postal ballot. Overall voter turnout was 68.42% as per the Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB). Following the election, there were still 26 positions vacant because of negative voting/tied results/vacant without candidates¹⁵.

Elections in three municipalities – Phuentsholing, Thimphu and Gelephu was held on 27 April¹⁶. Uttar Kumar Rai won the contest of mayor in Phuentsholing¹⁷ – his second consecutive term. Ugyen Dorji won mayor job in

¹² <https://kuenselonline.com/detained-khamdang-ramjar-mp-indicted-on-seven-grounds/>

¹³ <https://kuenselonline.com/khamdang-ramjar-mp-sentenced-to-five-years-in-prison/>

¹⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/khamdang-ramjar-mp-resigns/>

¹⁵ <http://www.bhutannewsnetwork.com/2021/12/the-third-local-government-election-concludes/>

¹⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/thromde-election-to-be-held-on-the-set-date-despite-lockdown-in-pling/>

¹⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/uttar-kumar-rai-won-on-more-roads-bigger-plans/>

Thimphu while Tshering Norbu was elected Gelephu Mayor. Ugyen Dorji was an employee with the Thimphu municipality while Norbu had served as mayor in Gelephu in 2011-16 term.

ECB disqualified Dangchu gup's nominee Pemba after RAA revoked¹⁸ his audit clearance that is required by the ECB for anyone standing for election. Seven aspiring LG candidates in Wangdue disqualified because of party affiliations¹⁹. In Gelephu, Passang Dorji was denied standing for election citing his current party membership while Dhan Maya Dhimal's nomination was rejected on grounds of criminal records even though she presented security clearance²⁰. Local government representatives are not entertained to own any form of business licenses. Samdrupjongkhar district administration terminated Wangphu gewog Mangmi Tashi Wangchuk on 17 May as per the judgement by High Court. The court judgment stated that the Mangmi had served two terms holding the contractor license since 2011. The court then passed the judgment to terminate him within two months from the day of the judgment. The Mangmi had submitted an undertaking letter to the returning officer stating that he will transfer the license to his brother if he wins the election during the local government elections in 2011. However, he didn't²¹.

Gender imbalance is a nature of Bhutanese politics. The country has no legal instruments to improve female representation in public sector. Politics has been the job of males, traditionally. Thimphu had 2 female gup candidates²² while Trashiyangtse district nominated only one female amongst 22 gup candidates²³. Representation of the female candidates in many other districts was also poor.

¹⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/raa-revokes-dangchu-gup-candidates-audit-clearance/>

¹⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/seven-aspiring-lg-candidates-in-wangdue-disqualified-because-of-party-affiliations/>

²⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/three-thromde-tshogpa-candidates-disqualified/>

²¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/wangphu-mangmi-terminated-for-holding-license/>

²² <https://kuenselonline.com/thimphu-nominates-2-female-gup-candidates/>

²³ <https://kuenselonline.com/trashiyangtse-has-one-female-candidate-amongst-22-gup-candidates>

Other peculiar characteristics of the Bhutanese election system is to force the individuals to vote in the constituency where their name is permanently registered. In absence of proper Geographical Information System designating street address, Bhutanese usually don't change their address. There's no correspondence from government with the citizens to maintain their postal address updated. The large metropolitan population travel to villages during election seasons. While they hardly know the candidates or their activities or gain anything from their win, citizens have no option other than to vote for unknown candidates. On the contrary, the elected representatives in the urban centers like Thimphu or Phuentsholing have to serve individuals who don't have any say in their city's decision-making process or political processes. Section 100 of the Election Act of Bhutan 2008 mandates a voter to be registered in the civil registry and have a household number of civil registration in that town for not less than one year, to be a voter²⁴.

Thimphu's population at the beginning of 2021 was 114,551. Yet, Thimphu had only 8,007 eligible voters for municipality election. Phuentsholing had 27,658 residents according to the Population and Housing Census of Bhutan 2017, but the city had only 932 voters who were eligible to decide the future of the city. In Gelephu, the number of city resident were 9,858, but only 1,542 individuals had rights to decide on future of the city. In short, a small number of individuals are deciding the future of thousands of individuals.

Police in Zhemgang detained the Mangmi of Shingkhari gewog on 10 June for allegedly claiming life insurance of a woman in October 2020, who was still alive. Zhemgang district administration forwarded the case to police after the Department of Immigration and Census asked the district administration for the action. It is alleged the mangmi had forged signatures and falsely claimed the rural insurance²⁵.

²⁴ <https://www.ecb.bt/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/ElectionActEnglish.pdf>

²⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/gewog-leader-detained-for-false-claim-of-rural-life-insurance/>

Lily Wangchuk resigned as the Vice President of the DPT²⁶ and applied to withdraw from the primary membership of the party²⁷. She was former president of Druk Chirwang Tshogpa (DCT). Failing to cross the threshold (10% of the total votes cast) to participate in the next generation election in 2013, she joined DPT in 2017 just before third general election. She had contested from North Thimphu constituency and lost.

People's Democratic Party (PDP) has begun head hunt for individuals ready to stand its candidate in general election in 2023. At least six candidates are required to fill the gap who would not be contesting for age factor and personal reasons²⁸

Former Home Minister Dago Tshering was announced to be honoured in Japan with Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Star award. However, the move was opposed by the activists in exile who campaigned for withdrawal of the medal and the honours²⁹ for his involvement in the human rights violations in 1990. South Asian and Japanese media covered the call³⁰ following which Tshering was not conferred with the medal.

Bhutan made some progress in widening its foreign relation that had remain stagnant since the ouster of DPT in 2013 election. King Jigme Khesar appointed Sonam Tobgay as the Ambassador to the Commonwealth of Australia on 2 July. He presented his credentials to David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), the Governor-General of Australia on 29 September.

The RGOB stayed neutral on Taliban taking over the reins of government in Afghanistan³¹ and have not spelled out the future of the bilateral relations with the country.

²⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/one-of-dpts-vice-presidents-resign/>

²⁷ <https://thebhutanese.bt/dpt-vp-lily-wangchuk-resigns-from-the-party/>

²⁸ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=159904>

²⁹ <http://www.bhutannewsnetwork.com/2021/06/objections-for-honouring-dago-tshering/>

³⁰ <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/07/05/national/bhutan-refugees/>

³¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/government-to-be-neutral-on-afghanistans-taliban-government-sources>

Foreign Minister Dr Tandi Dorji and the Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, Wu Jianghao, signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the 'Three-Step Roadmap for Expediting the Bhutan-China Boundary Negotiations on 14 October. Boundary negotiations between the countries began in 1984 and the two sides have held 24 rounds of boundary talks and ten rounds of meeting at the expert group level – resulting in 1988 Joint Communique on the Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the Boundary and the 1998 Agreement on the Maintenance of Peace, Tranquility and status quo in the Bhutan-China Border Areas. The new MoU is expected to provide a fresh impetus to the boundary talks³².

RIGHT TO EXPRESSION AND FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Social media, specifically Facebook, has become the most used and followed media in the country. The acceptance is growing faster and reliance on any form of information is building. Additionally, it has become the platform to seek quicker attention from public and authorities. Misuse of social media is growing more faster than is positive use.

Thimphu District Court sentenced 74-year-old businessman on charges of harassment for sharing intimate video with a young woman on social media³³ in April. He was arrested by police and charged³⁴. Other three individuals were arrested for circulating inappropriate video online, in Samdurp Jongkhar, in October³⁵.

Fake social media accounts are a common phenomenon as an alternative to exercising freedom of speech exemplified by Penjor Penjor case. One fake

³² <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=159103>

³³ <https://kuenselonline.com/court-sentences-74-year-old-businessman-for-harassment/>

³⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/police-arrests-elderly-man-for-sharing-videos/>

³⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/three-arrested-for-circulating-inappropriate-video-online/>

account was of finance minister³⁶ while many others are unknown personalisation used for various reasons from criticising government to seeking donations³⁷. The individuals seeking pastures on fake accounts was results of the authorities charging on critics. Technically, Bhutan has unwritten rule that either you support the authority or face the consequences. Critics and opposition are hardly tolerated. The critics are tagged as anti-national elements.

A study by Bhutan Media Foundation, ‘Social Media Landscape in Bhutan’, found about 38 percent of social media users in the country reported having received spam and indecent posts one or more times; 16 percent of users reported getting trolled; 12 percent reported hacking; and having fallen prey to scams. The study showed that 90.5 percent of the respondents were members of at least one social media platform suggesting that the social media penetration rate in Bhutan is “very high”. The social media penetration rate in urban areas is 96 percent and 87.6 percent in rural areas. About 91.5 percent of men and 89.5 percent of women were active social media users³⁸.

Whistleblowing comes with a big cost in a small society³⁹ where bureaucracy has thrived on favouritism and nepotism on top of senior management bullying juniors as if they are their personal servants. This has adversely discouraged reporting corruption and inappropriate behaviours of the government employees.

As part of the Journalists’ Association of Bhutan’s (JAB) effort to strengthen rural populations’ involvement in healthy discussions on social issues affecting their communities, about 120 people from six districts were trained on the use of social media platforms and citizen journalism. Two journalists from Ox Media facilitated the month-long training. The citizen

³⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/fake-finance-minister-account-on-social-media/>

³⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/social-media-misused-to-solicit-donations-for-fake-causes/>

³⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/about-50-percent-of-social-media-users-susceptible-to-privacy-and-security-threats>

³⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/whistleblowing-comes-at-a-big-cost-in-a-small-society/>

journalism workshop focused on how people can use various social media platforms to report news and issues and become active citizen journalists by using social media platforms⁴⁰.

In August, the High Court upheld the judgement by Trongsa District Court and ordered Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS) to recruit Dzongkha producer and anchor. BBS had announced vacancy for two people as Dzongkha producer and anchor on 4 April 2019. The individual who topped the interview process withdrew his candidature, but BBS refused to hire⁴¹ the individual on third on the merit list. A case was filed at the Trongsa District Court in June where the court had ordered the BBS to hire the plaintiff who was on listed third, effective 1 July⁴², which BBS challenged in High Court.

Conflict between National Commission for Women and Children (NCWC) and media outlets remain unresolved as to whether it's appropriate to publish news stories on rape cases. While NCWC argues, the stories would hamper the investigation of the incident, media fraternity argue this would help bring out the ground situation. NCWC claims media must seek consents of the victims to publish their stories, those in media argue that if the information provided was correct and didn't lead to the identification of the victim, publication of rape stories shouldn't require consent from the relevant agencies such as NCWC, police or parents⁴³.

On World Press Freedom Day, JAB launched its occasional journal, Bhutan Press Mirror. It included experiences and perspectives of Bhutanese journalists during the pandemic and rural stories supported through JAB⁴⁴.

⁴⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/jab-trains-rural-communities-on-citizen-journalism/>

⁴¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/high-court-upholds-lower-court-judgment-on-bbs-recruitment-case/>

⁴² <https://kuenselonline.com/trongsa-court-orders-bbs-to-recruit-dzongkha-producer-and-anchor/>

⁴³ <https://kuenselonline.com/ncwc-and-media-discuss-issues/>

⁴⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/pm-journalists-should-have-full-and-uncensored-access-to-information/>

Thimphu municipality, in its notification on 12 April, tightened the process of obtaining information - any individual or media person wanting to avail information required to fill up a form and wait for the response from the media relations officer. It would take three to five business days to get the information⁴⁵. It's part of the process to make it harder for journalists to obtain information and provide time for the authority to filter out what information to hide and what to release. Access to information still a challenge for journalists⁴⁶.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The country has primarily Hindu and Buddhist followers but there are few who follow other religions as well – 70% are Buddhist, 25% are Hindus and rest others. The state provides incentives primarily to Drukpa Sect of the Buddhism while Hinduism receives sympathetic support. There were no incidents relating to the violations of religious freedom during the reporting period.

MINORITY ISSUES

LGBTIQ community (Pride Bhutan) launched toll-free number in July to provide support for their fraternity. The community said it received 30 calls within the first month of starting the service⁴⁷.

The Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) provided equipment such as musical, tailoring, bakery⁴⁸, and candy manufacturing equipment to start their own business⁴⁹ encouraging them to become independent.

⁴⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/media-to-seek-written-approval-from-thimphu-thromde-for-information/>

⁴⁶ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160460>

⁴⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/lgbtiq-community-launches-toll-free-number-to-provide-support/>

⁴⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/persons-with-disabilities-undergo-critical-skills-training/>

⁴⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/persons-with-disabilities-to-venture-into-group-businesses/>

School closure and adopting to different means of tutoring negatively impacted the students with disabilities⁵⁰ in their learning journey. Bhutan does not have any technology at this stage to facilitate virtual learning for people with disabilities.

Bjishong Central School in Gasa with 18 students with disabilities, Tshaphel Lower Secondary School with 14 students in Haa, and Khuruthang Middle Secondary School in Punakha with seven students, were identified as inclusive and special education programme⁵¹ when the educational inclusive programme started in 2021 academic session. Of over 1,600 children living with disabilities in the country, only about 750 go to school⁵².

For the first time, five people living with disabilities sat for the functional literacy test (FLT) conducted by ECB as part of the local government elections. One such aspiring candidate, 29-year-old Tshering Tenzin, a Radio Jockey at one of the radio stations in Thimphu, said one reason people with disabilities in the country never took part in the elections could be because they had no one to inspire them⁵³. However, he did not contest the election too.

Tendruk Central School, the only inclusive school in Samtse, is facing difficulties in providing Special Education Needs (SEN) to students with disabilities. Having the highest diversity of special children, the school has limited facilities. SEN coordinator and a SEN provider in Tendruk CS, Tara Devi Giri, said there is only one inclusive school in Samtse. SEN division has endorsed one or two inclusive schools in each district. She said there is a lot of pressure on the school admission from the local gewogs and from other districts as well⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/school-closure-put-pressure-on-students-with-disabilities-2/>

⁵¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/moe-reaches-out-to-students-with-disabilities/>

⁵² <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=161955>

⁵³ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158785>

⁵⁴ <https://thebhutanese.bt/inclusive-school-in-samtse-faces-numerous-challenges-to-provide-special-education-to-the-students-with-disabilities/>

Bhutan made its debut at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics Games on 24 August. A Bhutanese female para-athlete, Chimi Dema, 28, represented the country at the games. Dema had created history by securing a Minimum Qualification Score (MQS) during the 2019 Dubai World Para Athletics Championships⁵⁵.

A group of 49 Bhutanese sex workers have come together to form a network to exchange support and overcome challenges they faced, through other CSOs. Sex workers are not recognised under law and their business remain illegal in Bhutan⁵⁶. The number of individuals working as sex workers had risen in Thimphu during the pandemic⁵⁷.

WOMEN ISSUES

Overall situation of women in Bhutan has not improved. Participation and opportunities for women are still far behind their male counterparts. Domestic and sexual violence against women and girl children remain unabated. Safety of girls and women have become a serious issue⁵⁸.

Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BCCI) trained women on how to address the sexual harassment at workplace⁵⁹. However, such sensitisation in public sector is absent.

⁵⁵ <https://thebhutanese.bt/bhutan-makes-its-debut-at-the-tokyo-2020-paralympics-with-a-para-athlete-who-qualified-on-her-own-performance/>

⁵⁶ <https://thebhutanese.bt/49-sex-workers-form-a-network-for-awareness-and-protection/>

⁵⁷ <https://thebhutanese.bt/sex-workers-on-the-rise-in-thimphu-due-to-the-pandemic/>

⁵⁸ <https://thebhutanese.bt/safety-of-our-girls/>

⁵⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/internal-mechanism-is-key-to-address-sexual-harassment-at-workplace-bcci/>

In May, 10 female students lodged complaint against an assistant lecturer at Sherubtse College⁶⁰ for body shaming, late night chats and academic partiality. Two former students joined the team alleging the lecturer of sexual harassment⁶¹. Internal investigation by the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) found the harassment to be true against three students. The college forwarded the case to RBP in November. The college withheld his promotion⁶² for three years after the completion of his Masters⁶³.

The Bhutan Power Corporation (BPC) suspended a director⁶⁴ on 24 September for alleged sexual harassment of another BPC employee on 15 September. The director remains suspended until the court verdicts are out. If he is found guilty of sexual harassment, he will then be dealt as per the BPC Service Rules and Regulations July 2016⁶⁵. The case was forwarded to the RBI⁶⁶ for further investigation⁶⁷. The case was filed at Thimphu district court in December⁶⁸.

The government has approved the proposal to do away with the 30 percent customs duty and 5 percent sales tax on sanitary products⁶⁹. However, this has not translated into lower price for the consumer. The government lack monitoring mechanism and shopkeepers are adamant to keep the price.

⁶⁰ <https://thebhutanese.bt/10-sherubtse-students-filed-harassment-complaint-against-lecturer/>

⁶¹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/2-more-ex-students-come-forward-as-rub-vc-orders-a-re-investigation-into-sherubtse-case/>

⁶² <https://thebhutanese.bt/rub-suspends-lecturer-and-forwards-case-to-rbp/>

⁶³ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160799>

⁶⁴ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158084>

⁶⁵ <https://thebhutanese.bt/bpc-management-suspends-director-in-connection-to-sexual-harassment-case/>

⁶⁶ <https://thebhutanese.bt/bpc-forwards-alleged-sexual-harassment-case-to-the-royal-bhutan-police/>

⁶⁷ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158439>

⁶⁸ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=162081>

⁶⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/no-difference-in-price-of-sanitary-products-after-tax-exemption/>

The number of people experiencing gender-based violence increased by 53.5 percent in 2020, according to Respect, Educate, Nurture, Empower Women (RENEW). It recorded 373 more complaints of abuse than in 2019. In 2019, 696 complaints were recorded⁷⁰. NCWC also recorded 223 gender violence during the second lockdown (20 December – 15 January). RENEW recorded another 130 cases of which 92 victims were females, 16 were males, and 22 children.

Records with RENEW showed that Wangduephodrang recorded the highest with 19 cases. NCWC received 86 phone calls related to gender-based violence, which included domestic violence, intimate partner violence and non-partner violence, of which 22 were males. Of them, 31 cases needed immediate interventions, where the victims were rescued to emergency shelter homes⁷¹.

Trongsa District Court, in January, convicted a non-Bhutanese labourer and sentenced him to five months and five days in prison for sexually harassing a female De-Suup on duty in August 2020⁷².

The Trongsa District Court ordered Tagtse College of Language and Culture Studies to reinstate seven staffs who were compulsorily retired in May 2019. The court also ordered the college to pay their salaries to date with arrears. The college compulsorily retired nine lecturers and a supporting staff following the accusation of sexual harassment by 19 girls. However, the police investigating the allegations dropped all charges against them. The staff then challenged RBU in court for terminating them without following due process. The three other staffs were sentenced to three months to nine months in prison for sexual harassment. Phub Gyeltshen, a lecturer, was sentenced to nine months in prison for kissing, asking a student to sleep and marry him. Two other lecturers, Pema Wangchuk and Tobgay were sentenced to three months each in prison for kissing a student and

⁷⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/gender-based-violence-spikes-53-5-percent-in-2020/>

⁷¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/gender-based-violence-during-second-lockdown-cross-200-mark/>

⁷² <https://kuenselonline.com/expatriate-worker-convicted-for-sexual-harassment/>

touching a girl improperly respectively. They were also ordered to pay a compensation of Nu 11,250 each to the girls⁷³.

Thimphu District Court has convicted three women in connection to trafficking in persons in June. The case first surfaced when the Bhutanese embassy in New Delhi confirmed that three women were rescued by the Mumbai police from a Sri Lankan travel agent for trying to fly them to Sri Lanka in June 2018. The three accused, 38-year-old Dawa Dema from Trongsa, 46-year-old Tshering Zangmo from Thimphu and 23-year-old Tandin Wangmo from Trashiyangtse were convicted. Dema was charged for the crime of trafficking in persons and was arrested on 26 January 2020. Wangmo was convicted for 3 years for trafficking of a person and 1 year and six months for the attempt to trafficking of a person. And Zangmo was convicted for one year and six months in prison for the offence of aiding and abetting. For failure to report the crime, court has ordered her to pay Nu 3,750 to the government as the offence is considered as violation⁷⁴.

The government ministers claim sexual harassment is not a part of Bhutanese culture⁷⁵ despite facts in the field showing large number of sexual harassment cases reported and evidence of many children born without the identity of father in central Bhutan.

⁷³ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=164037>

⁷⁴ <https://thebhutanese.bt/three-women-convicted-in-connection-to-human-trafficking-case/>

⁷⁵ <https://thebhutanese.bt/sexual-harassment-is-not-a-part-of-our-culture-ncwc-chair-lyonpo-dr-tandi-dorji/>

CHILDREN ISSUES

Lockdown pushed teaching learning process online⁷⁶. Learning Management System was developed to help students for online learning⁷⁷. Children and their parents were happy⁷⁸ when schools opened in October for face-to-face learning⁷⁹⁸⁰. When students returned to classrooms, it was late to finish their prescribed curriculum within the academic year. The government ordered that the classes must extend full day on Saturdays to cover the lessons⁸¹. UNICEF had warned that nationwide closure of the schools would harm the education of the children⁸² but the government turned deaf ear to the UN advise and continue to impose lockdowns. With increasing COVID cases in southern districts, the government transferred many students to northern schools⁸³⁸⁴.

Bhutan saw a relative decrease in the school dropout rate at 5.9 percent in 2021 compared to the 7.4 percent recorded the previous year - despite concerns over the impact of the pandemic, according to the Annual Education Statistics 2021. The highest dropout rate was observed among students in grade VII⁸⁵.

The NCWC conducted a stakeholder consultation meeting to help drafting a National Child Policy. The concept note on National Child Policy was approved by ministerial cabinet on 30 April 2019. The National Child Policy is expected to establish a coherent strategic policy framework (that is non-

⁷⁶ <https://thebhutanese.bt/schools-in-phuentsholing-thromde-switch-to-online-teaching-learning-mode>

⁷⁷ <https://kuenselononline.com/lms-to-facilitate-learning-during-a-crisis/>

⁷⁸ <https://kuenselononline.com/parents-rejoice-as-children-return-to-school/>

⁷⁹ <https://kuenselononline.com/class-vii-and-viii-students-in-p-ling-return-to-schools/>

⁸⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158586>

⁸¹ <https://kuenselononline.com/moe-orders-classes-on-saturdays-to-cover-lessons/>

⁸² <https://kuenselononline.com/nationwide-closure-of-schools-will-do-more-harm-than-good-unicef/>

⁸³ <https://thebhutanese.bt/phuentsholing-students-to-relocate-in-punakha-after-mid-term-exams/>

⁸⁴ <https://kuenselononline.com/ministry-considering-plans-to-relocate-phuentsholing-students/>

⁸⁵ <https://kuenselononline.com/school-dropout-rate-drops-to-5-9/>

existent presently) for the promotion of child wellbeing and protection. According to the NCWC every week, a woman or a child was sexually assaulted between 2009 and 2020 - either at work, school or at home⁸⁶.

The Human Rights Committee of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recommended parliamentarians to amend the Child Care and Protection Act 2011 to include all rights enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of a Child (CRC). The recommendation was discussed in Paro in April during a workshop on the human right treaty mechanism with a focus on CRC. Bhutan was one of the first countries to sign and ratify the CRC in 1990 and the two optional protocols to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and children's involvement in armed conflict in 2009. After signing and ratifying the CRC and the optional protocols without any reservation, challenges remained in implementing the laws. Without proper legal guidance, lawmakers found difficulty in amending acts and discussing issues related to CRC provisions⁸⁷.

Shortage of classrooms in Nganglam MSS forced parents to enroll Pre Primary students in Gashari – 12 km away. This has increased the costs for the parents by almost Nu 14,000 a month per student to cover the cost of transport, salary for the driver, fuel and maintenance of the bus.⁸⁸

The teacher transfer cases have been a perennial problem with no solution in sight. Transfers are sought on marital or health grounds, and number of years served in the rural areas. In 2020, out of 104 transfer cases, 54 teachers were transferred on the marital ground. In 2021, out of 153 teachers, 99 teachers were transferred on marital grounds. Every year 2,000 to 3,000 teachers seek transfer⁸⁹ to better location. Despite being the highest-paid

⁸⁶ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=162092>

⁸⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/involving-parliamentarians-to-prepare-for-crc-report/>

⁸⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/shortage-of-classrooms-in-nganglam-mss-force-parents-to-enrol-pp-students-in-gashari/>

⁸⁹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/every-year-2000-3000-teachers-seek-transfer-on-various-grounds/>

civil servants in the country, teachers leaving the profession is still on the rise in the country. As per the Annual Education Statistics 2021, more than three hundred teachers left the profession in 2021, 190 more than previous year. Of 353 teachers who left the profession, 224 resigned voluntarily, 54 superannuated, three on compulsory resignation and 49 left after their contract expired⁹⁰.

The government targets to increase the Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD) enrolment rate to 50 percent by 2024 and 100 percent by 2030. Lack of facilitators, the bureaucratic procedures in recruiting facilitators, lack of funds to establish ECCD centres, and professional development facilitators are major challenges to achieve the target. Centres are being established, but many without facilitators. For instance, the Tshalumaphey ECCD Centre in Thimphu was inaugurated in early 2021 but remained closed until the reporting period. There are no facilitators. The ECCD Centre at Guma in Punakha remained closed because the only facilitator was on maternity leave. Many centres flopped after grand openings because of a lack of manpower to run them⁹¹.

With the objective of modernising the education system, Education Ministry drafted a new education policy in 2008. However, this has not been materialised. The DNT government even did not entertain the draft for review in cabinet⁹².

Since the extended classroom in Athang closed in 2017, many children in the village remain unable to avail primary school education⁹³. Several students from southern districts affected by COVID pandemic were shifted to northern districts, with assurance to continue with their education. Accommodation for students travelling inter-districts for studies was a problem⁹⁴.

⁹⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160440>

⁹¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/100-percent-eccd-enrollment-by-2030/>

⁹² <https://kuenselonline.com/national-education-policy-put-on-hold/>

⁹³ <https://kuenselonline.com/no-school-in-athangs-remote-villages/>

⁹⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/hostel-congestion-in-samcholing-school/>

Despite having legal frameworks and numerous agencies providing services to children in need of care and protection, there is still a need for an effective child protection system in the country. Children are vulnerable and the biggest challenge in eliminating violence against children is because cases go unreported⁹⁵. Despite government's commitments, legal instruments in place and other effects, violence against girl children continue unabated. The government failed to take any concrete initiative to avoid incidents. The only efforts made was to increase the intensity of the punishment, rather than raising awareness. RENEW reported 237 cases of teenage pregnancy in 18 dzongkhags in 2020⁹⁶. However, RBP reported this number to be 330. Of them, only 18 cases were reported to the police and 12 of them were minors⁹⁷.

On 19 July, Tsirang District Court convicted a 56-year-old man from Tsholingkhar village to 30 years in prison⁹⁸ in connection to molesting 10 girl students (studying in grade II and III), aged between 9 years to 12 years. The case was first reported to the Tsirang police in November 2019. The judgment ordered the defendant to pay a compensation of Nu 90,000 to each victim, within 10 days of judgement passed⁹⁹¹⁰⁰.

Tsirang police apprehended a 38-year-old man on 3 March from Gelephu for sexually abusing eight-year-old boy - a class II student. The incident was reported to police by the officiating principal of the school, and he was informed by the victim's mother stating that her son was raped by a man

⁹⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/involving-community-to-protect-children/>

⁹⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/237-reported-cases-of-teenage-pregnancy-in-18-dzongkhags-in-2020/>

⁹⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/police-record-24-pregnancy-cases-among-students/>

⁹⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/teacher-sentenced-to-30-years-in-prison-for-child-molestation/>

⁹⁹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/tsirang-district-court-sentences-teacher-to-30-years-for-molesting-10-children-of-classes-2-and-3/>

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=161874>

from Parsharling Toed, Tsirang¹⁰¹. The man was sentenced to 16 years in prison by the district court¹⁰².

RBP said it received 6 cases of statutory rape (below 12 years of age) until 17 November and 49 cases of rape of child above 12 years¹⁰³. The rape and murder of an 8-year-old girl in Paro in 2019, the rape of 5-year-old girl in Dagana in 2019, the rape of an 11-year-old girl in Samdrupjongkhar resulting in pregnancy and birth of a baby boy in 2020, and the rape of an 8-year-old boy in Tsirang in 2021 are some of the statutory rape cases reported that shocked the nation. However, there are many more cases that go unreported due to circumstances.

Tsirang police arrested a 26-year-old man from Dagana for the alleged rape of a minor. The suspect and the 13-year-old girl first met through Facebook and were seeing each other since June. The girl and the man had allegedly spent night together on 5 September. While the suspect is working in one of the automobile workshops in Tsirang, she is a student¹⁰⁴.

Mongar Police arrested a 21-year-old man on 17 September for allegedly impregnating his 14-year-old half-sister. The incident was reported to police on 16 September by the victim's biological father¹⁰⁵.

Punakha Police arrested a 27-year-old married man for allegedly raping a 17-year-old girl on 21 August after reported by victim's father. The victim is young sister of man's wife. The man entered drunk to victim's house on that night and raped her¹⁰⁶.

Punakha police in September registered a case after a 17-year-old girl accused her stepfather of raping her. She lost her mother in 2019 to liver

¹⁰¹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/man-arrested-for-a-rape-of-a-minor-boy/>

¹⁰² <https://kuenselonline.com/child-rapist-sentenced-to-16-years-in-prison/>

¹⁰³ <https://thebhutanese.bt/55-minors-raped-in-2021/>

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158224>

¹⁰⁵ <https://thebhutanese.bt/two-minors-raped-in-mongar-in-separate-cases/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://thebhutanese.bt/victims-sister-is-witness-in-punakha-rape-case-of-a-minor/>

cancer and since then she was living with her stepfather and her 4-year-old half-brother¹⁰⁷.

Two men in their late 30s arrested for the alleged statutory rape in Zhemgang. They are accused of the alleged rape of a nine-year-old girl in separate incidents. The suspects were arrested November. While one of the suspects was the girl's stepfather, the other one was their landlord. Mother then took the girl for a medical checkup when she complained pain. Suspecting rape, they informed the police that arrested the suspects¹⁰⁸.

A 26-year-old man, a lab assistant in a Tsirang school, was arrested in August for the alleged rape of a 17-year-old student. The girl who was on medical leave from school reportedly sneaked out of the house at night to meet the suspect. Upon inquiry, she confessed about the relationship to her uncle and the school administration reported the case to the police.¹⁰⁹

Mongar Police charged a 22-year-old man for statutory rape of 16-year-old girl on 25 November. The man was originally from Paro. The minor gave birth¹¹⁰.

Bumthang District Court sentenced a 31-year man from Poengar village in Chhoekhor gewog to 10 years in prison for raping his 17-year-old niece. The judgment rendered on 17 November stated that the man had raped the victim multiple times¹¹¹.

The Samdrupjongkhar District Court handed a 32-year and 10-month prison term to a 35-year-old man for the rape of a girl below the age of 12 on 2 November. The judgement said, the defendant and plaintiff had drawn an agreement where the defendant's father agreed to pay Nu 40,000 as

¹⁰⁷ <https://thebhutanese.bt/minor-in-punakha-accused-step-father-of-rape-a-month-ago-but-rbp-yet-to-charge-sheet-case/>

¹⁰⁸ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=161476>

¹⁰⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/lab-assistant-arrested-for-rape-of-a-minor-in-tsirang/>

¹¹⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=161554>

¹¹¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/uncle-convicted-of-raping-niece-in-bumthang/>

compensation to the victim's father. The defendant also agreed to give shares and education to the victim's son equal to that of his real son. The police registered the case on 26 May after the gewog officials reported that a 12-year-old girl gave birth to a baby boy on 25 May¹¹². The incident happened in 2020 when schools remained close due to the pandemic¹¹³.

Mongar Police detained a 25-year-old health worker on 13 September for allegedly raping a 13-year-old minor¹¹⁴. Similarly, Police in Tsirang arrested another 26-year-old man from Dagana for alleged rape of a minor, in September¹¹⁵. An eight-year-old girl was raped in Samtse on 10 June¹¹⁶.

Massagers in Phuetsholing, including minor, were investigated for alleged sexual favour for attracting customers¹¹⁷.

The Supreme Court, in August, sentenced a 22-year-old teacher, Pema Loday, from Sangacholing (Chargharey), to four years in prison for molesting a 16-year-old student in Lhuentse. The incident had occurred in 2019 in the school's IT laboratory¹¹⁸.

Wangduephodrang District Court sentenced a 20-year-old man to nine years in prison for rape of a minor. Judgment rendered on 19 July said Tenzin Rabgay from Tsirang and the 15-year-old girl met through social media and had an affair for almost a year¹¹⁹.

¹¹² <https://kuenselonline.com/man-gets-32-year-prison-term-for-rape-of-a-minor/>

¹¹³ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160136>

¹¹⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/health-worker-detained-for-alleged-rape-of-a-minor-in-mongar/>

¹¹⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-arrested-for-rape-of-a-minor-2/>

¹¹⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/an-eight-year-old-girl-allegedly-raped/>

¹¹⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/circumstances-of-minor-suspected-of-prostitution-to-be-investigated/>

¹¹⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/contract-teacher-sentenced-for-child-molestation-and-official-misconduct/>

¹¹⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-sentenced-to-nine-years-in-prison-for-rape-of-minor/>

The OAG charged a 28-year-old-man to Pemagatshel District Court in May for alleged rape of a 15-year-old girl and incest. The incident was report to police in March after the report to local government officials failed to take any action against the man¹²⁰.

Dagana District Court in April sentenced a 23-year-old man from Tsendagang, Dagana to nine years in prison for rape of a child above the age of 12¹²¹.

Tsirang district court, in November, sentenced a 38-year-old man from Tsirang to a concurrent prison term of 16 years in connection with the rape of an eight-year-old boy. The convict was charged with unnatural sex, statutory rape and endangerment of child. The court also ordered the convict to pay compensation of over Nu 366,918 to the victim within six months from the date of the judgment¹²².

EMPLOYMENT AND LABOUR RIGHTS

Unemployment has been the biggest issues of the country and it has at times dominated election campaign. However, successive government failed to create any tangible number of employment opportunities to absorb graduates. Opening up for foreign employment also failed to provide any credible solution. Foreign employment starts with loan and many remain unable to pay out the loan itself, let alone support their family financially.

The 678 youths who went to Japan through the Learn and Earn Programme (LEP) had sanctioned Nu 700,000 each from Bhutan Development Bank Limited (BDBL). 182 of them have managed to liquidate their loans. Some of them have also managed to close the RICBL loans. There are remaining

¹²⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-charged-for-rape-of-a-minor/>

¹²¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-sentenced-to-nine-years-for-rape-of-minor/>

¹²² <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160320>

496 LEP youth who still have not finished paying back their loans with BDBL¹²³. The youths are back to country and are currently unemployed.

Few overseas employment agencies opened but entangled into problems from the beginning. The case against the Bhutan Employment Overseas (BEO), the agent who sent them to Japan, is still pending in the court¹²⁴. The agency is alleged to have sent youths to under paid jobs, often in dangerous situation. Death and permanent injury marked their stories.

Agriculture ministry encouraged those returning from overseas to test their luck in hydroponics agriculture. The ministry said it will inject 80% of the costs while investors arrange the rest¹²⁵.

Unemployment rate hits 5% in 2020. An increasing trend in unemployment rate has been observed over the years except for the year 2019¹²⁶. Proposal of the MoLHR to reduce job creation target from 52,930 jobs to 26,609 jobs for 12 FYP¹²⁷ created further uncertainties to the new graduates.

DNT during election, campaigned to increase the daily wages of the labourers. However, the government sought excuses to do away with its promise. Finance Minister Namgay Tshering said increasing daily wage from current Nu 125 to Nu 450, to what they promised, would impact those who would be asked to pay compensation in legal judgement where compensations are determined based on daily wages. The statement does not weigh benefits of larger population in favour a few individuals¹²⁸.

¹²³ <https://thebhutanese.bt/496-japan-lep-youth-worry-about-paying-back-loans/>

¹²⁴ <https://thebhutanese.bt/oag-is-waiting-for-closing-argument-and-judgment-of-the-beo-case/>

¹²⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/hydroponics-option-to-address-youth-unemployment/>

¹²⁶ <https://thebhutanese.bt/unemployment-rate-hits-5-in-2020/>

¹²⁷ <https://thebhutanese.bt/molhr-proposes-to-reduce-job-creation-target-from-52930-jobs-to-26609-jobs-for-12-fyp/>

¹²⁸ <https://thebhutanese.bt/finance-minister-answers-questions-on-the-possibility-of-increase-of-national-work-force-wage-rate>

MoLHR launched a ‘Digital Jobs in Bhutan: Demand creation and future skilling to shape Bhutan’s digital economy and future of work’ – as a resource-rich country, Bhutan struggles to translate its capital-intensive resource wealth into the creation of a sufficient number of jobs and due to its small size and remote, landlocked location, the diversification of the economy and the export base are more difficult to achieve in Bhutan than in some other countries¹²⁹. Diagnostic Trade Integration Study finds Bhutan as capital-rich, labour poor and unskilled country¹³⁰.

A youth centre in Bajo, Wangdue, conducted training for 21 youth aged between 15 and 28 years on basic skills required for employment and exploring loans from financial institutions to venture into business¹³¹.

Almost two years after the education ministry started revising the National Youth Policy 2011 to ensure that all needs and concerns of youth are addressed, officials said the revision is still incomplete. Officials from the youth centre division said the revision could not be completed because the pandemic disrupted their consultations with stakeholders. The policy revision started in 2019 and was scheduled to be ready by June 2020¹³².

The Build Bhutan Project (BBP) was an ambitious project, launched in July, to create jobs for the young graduates – skilled or unskilled. The project was to help companies hire unemployed individuals in exchange for government providing subsidiary in salary for first year and provident funds. The employers are supposed to provide accommodation, if required. The project was initiated with a budget of Nu 1.04 billion under the economic contingency plan to address labour shortage and provide employment to those who lost job because of the pandemic. It aimed at engaging 7,000 Bhutanese workers over a period of two years, of which 2,000 will be provided with skilling, reskilling and upskilling opportunities in construction

¹²⁹ <https://thebhutanese.bt/tech-and-ict-as-the-future-of-job-creation-in-bhutan/>

¹³⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/trade-study-finds-bhutan-as-capital-rich-labour-poor-and-unskilled-country/>

¹³¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/youth-centre-trains-young-jobseekers/>

¹³² <https://kuenselonline.com/two-years-on-youth-policy-revision-still-incomplete/>

trades leading to national certification¹³³. By May 2021, it engaged 663 individuals, failing in its primary mission.

Youth Engagement and Livelihood Programme and Gowa were other ambitious projects aimed at linked jobseeker with the employers. The ambitious FDI projects in ICTs also failed to deliver any outcome, partly because of the lack on government side to lobby international community.

The Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC)'s intake for public sector has reducing trends, with only 843 slots available for 2021¹³⁴. And the commission has indicated further redundancy in the near future.

The government intervened and helped 10 Bhutanese women leave for Qatar four days after they were intercepted by airport officials in New Delhi who suspected them of carrying fake visas. The women had left the country to work in gulf country without registering with an authorised agent in the Bhutan¹³⁵.

The Department of Local Governance reinforced the implementation of community contract practice in gewogs through carpentry and plumbing skilling programme¹³⁶. Couple of trainings were held in Bumthang and Tsirang as part of the project. The outcome from the training is yet to be observed. Some good business ideas even received government funding of Nu 50,000 each¹³⁷.

The State of The Nation report emphasised on how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the employment. The impact was immediate and widespread, and worsened by layoffs, new entrants into the labor market and overseas returnees. Moreover, the closure of businesses, both temporary and permanent, rendered many individuals jobless, whereby the

¹³³ <https://kuenselonline.com/bbp-engages-633-of-the-7000-target-workers/>

¹³⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/1994-graduates-vic-for-843-slots-in-the-civil-service/>

¹³⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/qatar-visa-issue-being-investigated-foreign-minister/>

¹³⁶ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158804>

¹³⁷ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=158833>

government's focus on investing in ideas and creating employment opportunities has been minimal. The unemployment rate almost doubled in 2020 - from 2.7% in 2019 to 5% in 2020 with youth unemployment jumping from 11.9% in 2019 to 22.6% in 2020. Besides unemployment, there has been no review on the issues of underemployment and underpayment despite the inflation and increasing burden of high rental costs¹³⁸.

PRISON SITUATION

Prison situation has not improved. There are no official data on number of prisoners in the country and prison capacities. Many prisoners are undisclosed. However, a few prisoners from Trashigang, Samdrup Jongkhar and Thimphu told The Bhutan Watch that prisons are in over capacity. The government has no mechanism to investigate this issue and recommend any improvements. Lack of government initiative comes from the traditional view that prisoners are criminals and must be treated inhumanly.

Inmates of an open-air prison (OAP) in Tareythang, Sarpang, were sent back to prisons in Trashigang and Thimphu after they engaged in a violent brawl in May. The video of the brawl went viral on Facebook on 8 May. A prisoner was seen hitting another inmate with a cricket bat and the other prisoner retaliated with a knife. The video was, however, deleted by 9 May. Officials on duty were attacked with stones. 45 police personnel were deployed at the site following the incident¹³⁹.

A second violence occurred in Thimphu in October. A video showing inmates at Chamgang Central Jail in Thimphu protesting against alleged

¹³⁸ <https://thebhutanese.bt/pandemic-doubled-unemployment-rate-but-a-fight-back-is-on/>

¹³⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/inmates-of-open-air-prison-in-tareythang-engage-in-violent-brawl/>

police brutality became viral¹⁴⁰. However, the authority blamed protest was to divert an ongoing investigation into phones and drugs smuggled into the central jail¹⁴¹. However, sources at the jail told The Bhutan Watch, the violence was result of misbehaviours by prison officials, reduction in facilities and restriction on access to meet family members and friends.

The situation of political prisoners remains unknown. Since the exit of ICRC, these inmates have not had any contact with their families. There is lack of apathy and responsibility in Bhutan Red Cross, formed following the exit of ICRC, in ensuring humane treatment of the political prisoners. Sources told The Bhutan Watch that there has not been a single prison visit by Bhutan Red Cross officials.

SECURITY AND CRIME

Despite lockdowns and strict surveillance of people's movement, criminal activities in the country continue unabated. The effort from the authority appears to focus on punishing those involved rather than educating the mass and addressing the causes of the criminal activities.

Police in Gyalpoishing, Mongar arrested a 19-year-old man on 15 November for the alleged possession of marijuana (cannabis)¹⁴².

The Phuentsholing police seized 40 fake Bhutanese banknotes in the denomination of 1,000 in December. A 56-year-old man from Jaigaon tried to pass the money to his wife from the Phuentshogling border gate. Police refused to take the money from him twice in the past and told him to transfer it legally. In December he again appeared at the closed gate and

¹⁴⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/jail-protest-linked-to-mobile-phone-raid-inside-chamgang-prison/>

¹⁴¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/chamgang-jail-incident-was-more-than-just-a-protest/>

¹⁴² <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=160936>

dropped a parcel in a black plastic bag and left the scene. With help from the bank, police confirmed it as counterfeit notes.¹⁴³

Police in Samtse arrested a 44-year-old man from Rinchhenphu village in Yoeseltse gewog on 29 December for allegedly crossing the border. Police suspected him of crossing the border only because he carried 15 tobacco leaves, not available at his home¹⁴⁴. Border with India was closed to stop COVID being spread.

A man from Haa died¹⁴⁵ for lack of services by the local hospital. He attended the district hospital on 24 December – who had sustained injuries from falling off the roof of this two-storey house. However, he was discharged on the same day without treatment. Two days later he returned with additional complication, after which referral was made to Thimphu national referral hospital, where he died.

Police officer beat two farmers in Zhemgang in February. The duo was travelling on bike without helmet & licence. The police officer was on his way to the village for a suicide investigation. One of the victims was the son-in-law of the woman, who had committed suicide in Khomshar recently¹⁴⁶.

Tsirang District Court sentenced a 27-year-old man from Kilkhorthang to five years in prison for committing a series of burglaries in Damphu town. The 8 March judgment stated that Sonam Wangdi stole cash and edible items worth Nu 82,524 from 17 shops in Damphu town and peripheral areas from February 2019 to September 2020. He was arrested in September 2020. Wangdi was given a concurrent sentence¹⁴⁷.

Six months after a woman was murdered in Haa, family members of the victim were living in fear, as the man, who murdered her, had allegedly

¹⁴³ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=162768>

¹⁴⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-arrested-for-allegedly-crossing-the-border/>

¹⁴⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/haa-dzongkhag-investigates-death-of-49-year-old-patient/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/police-officer-beats-two-farmers-in-zhemgang/>

¹⁴⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/serial-burglar-gets-5-years/>

threatened that he would kill three other people in the family. The family members were waiting for justice, as the case was before Haa District Court. The woman was murdered on 24 October 2020 by her son-in-law in Kipri, Uesu gewog¹⁴⁸.

Two years on, after a nine-year-old girl was murdered in Dechencholing, the family members are still waiting for justice. The victim's mother, Gita Maya Adhikari, has been suffering from mental breakdowns and suicidal thoughts. She has been in and out of the hospital. She cries at the mention of her late daughter Dina Koiraila. After the unfortunate incident, the family moved to Tsirang, but the father had to attend school with the victim's younger brother for about two months, as the little boy was too scared to go to school. The father, aged 36, Yagyanidhi Koirala worked as a city bus driver in Thimphu for four years before he was arrested for not being able to honour an agreement to pay off a debt under his father's name. It was during his nine months of imprisonment that the tragedy happened¹⁴⁹. While king and the government had come forward to support individuals under similar circumstances from Bhote tribe, the Koirala family received none other than sympathy. It was only The Bhutanese newspaper that published the news highlighting suffering of the family – other national media remained silent to the suffering.

The Samdrupjongkhar district court sentenced a 26-year-old man to three years' imprisonment for illegal possession of a firearm and hunting wild animals in November. The sentence is non-compoundable. The court also sentenced the defendant's two friends to six months' imprisonment each for hunting wild animals¹⁵⁰¹⁵¹.

¹⁴⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/murder-victims-family-wants-the-suspect-to-be-imprisoned-for-life/>

¹⁴⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/dechencholing-murder-victims-family-still-deprived-of-justice/>

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=161635>

¹⁵¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-sentenced-to-3-years-for-illegal-possession-of-firearm/>

Sarpang Police arrested a 33-year-old woman for allegedly murdering her stepmother on 16 October. Family members who were sleeping in separate rooms came to know about the incident when the stepmother screamed at night. The accused had allegedly hit the woman with a brick and stabbed her with a kitchen knife. The weapons used were surrendered to the police.¹⁵²

Punakha Police forwarded the vehicle scam case to the OAG on 25 October. While the police have retrieved 27 vehicles, 24 cases have been registered against five suspects, including one male. Three of the 24 vehicles were returned to their owners. The vehicle scam issue first came to light on 22 September when a man from Punakha reported that his Bolero, which he had rented out, had been sold for Nu 250,000.¹⁵³

Thimphu Police arrested 17 men for burglary, cattle rustling, and smuggling controlled substances in the first eight months of the year. Police said that the burglary cases were on the rise in 2021. There were 75 cases between January and August. This included six suspects involved in stealing cash and pieces of jewelry worth Nu 15 million from a house near the Centenary Farmers' Market on 26 July.

Police arrested a 25-year-old man on July 24 and a 31 and a 32-year-old man on July 26 for smuggling controlled substances in the country. Police also arrested a 27-year-old man from Mongar on August 19 for his involvement in 13 burglary cases in Thimphu. In total, 66,693 SP plus capsules; 7,260 Navy Cut cigarette packets and 2,467 chewing tobacco were smuggled in the country.¹⁵⁴

In contrast, Thimphu Police said in the past three years they observed a significant drop in crimes across the city. Between 2018 and 2020, there was a 60 percent drop in cases reported to the police. The number of cases fell from 2,595 in 2018 to 1,046 last year. In 2019, there were 1,999 cases

¹⁵² <https://kuenselonline.com/woman-arrested-for-alleged-murder-of-stepmother/>

¹⁵³ <https://kuenselonline.com/punakha-police-forward-vehicle-scam-case-to-the-oag/>

¹⁵⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/burglary-cases-increasing-in-thimphu-this-year/>

reported. In 2020, 306 suspects were arrested and charged. In 2019, 577 suspects and in 2018, 730 were arrested and charged.¹⁵⁵

Two girls, aged 8 and 9, were brutally murdered two months apart in 2019 leaving the nation in a state of shock and disbelief. Police still continue to hunt the murderers without success.¹⁵⁶

Gelephu Police charged a group of eight youths for involuntary manslaughter after a 21-year-old man from Sershong succumbed to head injury at Gelephu Central Regional Referral hospital on 30 May¹⁵⁷. The group, comprising of five boys and three girls, were detained for a month at Gelephu police station. Among the group, two are minors. Sources in Gelephu said one minor is a girl¹⁵⁸.

As of June, police recorded 44 cases of missing persons in the country. Records with police showed that of the 44 reported cases, 27 were found. Four were dead and 17 were still missing¹⁵⁹. The trend of individuals gone missing continues in the second half of the year.

The High Court on 22 July upheld the judgment of the Trashigang district court on case involving wife of a sub-divisional court in Wamrong - battery and trespassing. Wamrong sub-divisional and Trashigang District Courts found defendant Tshering Yangki guilty of battery and trespassing and gave a concurrent sentencing of 18 months in prison. The courts also ordered her to pay Nu 260,000 as compensation to the victim within a month of judgement passed. Yangki appealed to the high court earlier in the year¹⁶⁰.

¹⁵⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/thimphu-police-see-fewer-crimes/>

¹⁵⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/hunt-still-on-for-murderers-of-two-minors/>

¹⁵⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-dies-after-allegedly-beaten-by-eight-in-gelephu/>

¹⁵⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/eight-youth-booked-for-involuntary-manslaughter-following-the-death-of-a-21-year-old-in-may/>

¹⁵⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/44-people-reportedly-missing-in-the-past-six-months/>

¹⁶⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/high-court-upholds-lower-court-judgment-on-wamrong-battery-case/>

Thimphu District Court sentenced 33-year-old man to nine years and his partner 32-year-old woman to three years in prison for illicit trafficking of controlled substances, in May. Jigme from Tongmajangsa, Trashiyangtse and his partner, Kelzang Choden from Shumar in Pemagatshel were arrested after police found 5,743 capsules of Spasmo Proxyvon Plus (SP+) from Kelzang Choden's house in Changamtog on 7 December 2020¹⁶¹.

A 38-year-old man from Samtse was found dead with stabbed wounds in his apartment in Babesa, Thimphu on 14 May. The deceased was stabbed on the chest¹⁶². Other man sharing the room was arrested a couple of days later as a prime suspect¹⁶³.

The High Court sentenced a JDWNRH anesthesia technician to five years in prison for rape of a married woman and official misconduct. The 33-year-old technician was convicted of raping a patient attendant in April 2018 at the national referral hospital. He had sexual intercourse with the woman after injecting her with Fentanyl¹⁶⁴.

Trashigang District Court on 5 March convicted and sentenced four men - Sherub Thayee, 36, Wangchen, 26, Lobzang Wangchuk, 23 and Tshewang Gyelthen, 33 - to life imprisonment for vandalising four chortens in Trashigang¹⁶⁵. Later that month the court also convicted Daza, 34, from Khamdang to life imprisonment for chorten vandalism¹⁶⁶.

Gelephu police detained a 43-year-old man who allegedly pretended as a custom official and tricked two businessmen from Gelephu to deposit Nu 98,000 in January¹⁶⁷.

¹⁶¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/two-sentenced-for-illicit-trafficking-of-controlled-substances/>

¹⁶² <https://kuenselonline.com/man-disappears-after-fatally-stabbing-roommate/>

¹⁶³ <https://kuenselonline.com/police-nab-suspect-in-babesa-murder-case/>

¹⁶⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-slapped-five-years-for-rape-official-misconduct/>

¹⁶⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/choeten-vandals-sentenced-to-life/>

¹⁶⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/man-gets-life-term-for-choeten-vandalism/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/con-man-arrested/>

At least 15 people took their own lives in 2020, the youngest was a 13-year-old student. In 2019, 12 people killed themselves. In 2017, the youngest to take his life was a 12-year-old student and the oldest was a 64-year-old man. In 2016, Samtse recorded 17 suicide cases¹⁶⁸.

Gelephu police recovered bodies of a couple from a water tank used to store water for car servicing. The bodies were recovered on January 1 and 3. Police recovered the body of the 28-year-old woman and 30-year-old man in January after a workshop staff saw the body floating in the tank.¹⁶⁹

Lockdown

COVID spread and lockdown rules were harsh and inhuman in most part of the country. People violating the rule were treated as criminal. They were sentenced and charged. In the first lockdown in 2020, most arrested and imprisoned were released at the order of the king. The lockdown order was harsher for people living along the border. People crossing the border to see relatives or buy groceries were charged on violation of peace and tranquility. When The Bhutan Watch contacted a senior lecturer at the Royal Bhutan University why such harsher punishment was required, he responded that those breaching lockdown breach must be given death sentence.

The decisions were made at the central level and lacked adequate knowledge and understanding of the requirement for daily life at the rural setting. The rules even discarded the consideration for people who were living on daily wages in the cities.

Mongar District Court in February conducted the first hearing of a case involving 16 men from Ngatshang gewog for alleged violation of public order and tranquillity. The men had played archery during the second

¹⁶⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/suicide-cases-on-the-rise-in-samtse/>

¹⁶⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/couple-found-dead-in-a-water-storage-tank/>

lockdown in January. There were three groups of men alleged of playing archery during the lockdown¹⁷⁰.

Paro Police charged 26 people for breaching lockdown protocol. The 23 men and three women were charged for violating public order and tranquillity in eight different cases during the second nationwide lockdown. They allegedly breached section 448 of the Penal Code of Bhutan, which states a defendant shall be guilty of the offence of breach of public order and tranquillity if the defendant purposely fails to abide by the orders of the government issued in the interest of public safety, public order and tranquillity. Six men were found playing archery, four playing cards, and others for selling alcohol at night without a licence¹⁷¹.

The arbitrary application of the Section 410 and 448 of the Panel Code to punish citizens for minor violations of the lockdown had confused the legal experts. Those crossing the international border are also charged under the same provisions.

Section 410 states a person is guilty of a criminal nuisance if he/she knowingly or recklessly creates or maintains a condition including spreading a dangerous disease that injures or endangers the safety or health of the public.

While those charged under Section 410 had never been tested positive to COVID-19 – which technically means they had not endangered lives by spreading disease. Without their fault, these people have been sentenced up to 15 years imprisonment.

A 47-year-old mentally challenged woman died on 25 September in a quarantine facility in Lhamoidzingkha, Dagana. The relatives of the

¹⁷⁰ <https://kuenselonline.com/16-men-charged-for-breaching-lockdown-protocol-in-mongar/>

¹⁷¹ <https://kuenselonline.com/26-prosecuted-for-breaching-lockdown-protocol/>

deceased alleged that she died because of negligence from health officials. The deceased had heart problems and was a diabetic¹⁷².

Businesses were severely affected by lockdowns. They were forced to close during lockdowns¹⁷³ rather than applying specific protocols allowing only specific number of customers at a time. This not only affected the business with no sales and many goods expiring their use-by dates, but also the consumers who failed to purchase groceries for daily requirements.

WATER WOES

Despite being abundance of water, through the glaciers, Bhutan is facing water woos. Access to fresh drinking water is basic human rights. Bhutan legally does not recognise this, though. Providing access to fresh drinking water to its citizens is not a priority agenda for the Bhutanese government. Monsoon disrupts water sources around the country, causing a shortage of drinking water in many places. Permanent solutions are nowhere in sight.

Of 6,555 water sources in the country, 2,317 (35 percent) are drying up while 147 sources have dried up, a study by the Watershed Management Division of the Forest Department revealed. Springwater (4,048) and streams (2,191) are major sources of drinking and irrigation water with lakes, rivers, ponds, and marshes contributing a negligible portion. Rapid drying up of these water sources is likely to threaten the sustainability of agriculture sector on which 70% of the population depend on. Samtse, Tsirang, Mongar, Wangdue, and Dagana districts were severely affected. The country currently has 1,361 irrigation schemes, with a channel length of 2,888km that has benefitted 57,266 households across the country. Read more about our research on Water of Bhutan by Govinda Rizal on The Bhutan Journal.

¹⁷² <https://kuenselonline.com/mentally-challenged-woman-dies-in-a-quarantine-facility/>

¹⁷³ <https://kuenselonline.com/13-shops-punished-for-violating-safety-protocols/>

With more water sources in the area drying up every year, villagers in Chuzangang and Umling (in Sarpang) are left parched and worried. More than 400 households residing in the gewog receive drinking water supply only for an hour each in the morning and evening every day. For some, their turn to store water comes only after a day¹⁷⁴.

Residents in Gelephu are supplied with unsafe water to drink during summer. Washbasins in restaurants, bakeries and most of the taps are filled with silt. Residents said the water couldn't even be used for washing dishes. Many residents have been buying bottled water for drinking and cooking. A few restaurants resorted to serving meals on plastic plates without enough water supply¹⁷⁵.

Thimphu water supply is irregular and is frequently affected by floods or landslides when supply chains are damaged. In June, the residents in the capital lived without water for weeks¹⁷⁶¹⁷⁷ when water pipes were damaged by a landslide. Improving water supply is Thimphu Thrompon's top priority¹⁷⁸. In the same month, over 12,000 residents of Bajo town in Wangdue Phodrang district also lived without water for several days¹⁷⁹.

In Khamaed village of Jigme Chhoeling Gewog in Sarpang, winter is a worrying time about not having sufficient water. There were few new water supply projects initiated in Sarpang and Udzorong, Trashigang¹⁸⁰.

People of Wakhar village under Lumang Gewog in Trashigang have been grappling with water shortage for more than a decade. Their only water source located some three kilometers away is drying up slowly¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁴ <https://kuenselonline.com/water-woes-worsen-in-chuzangang/>

¹⁷⁵ <https://kuenselonline.com/gelephu-residents-drink-water-meant-for-toilet/>

¹⁷⁶ <https://kuenselonline.com/parts-of-thimphu-without-water-for-days/>

¹⁷⁷ <https://kuenselonline.com/parts-of-thimphu-continue-to-face-water-shortages/>

¹⁷⁸ <https://kuenselonline.com/improving-water-supply-is-thimphu-thrompons-top-priority/>

¹⁷⁹ <https://kuenselonline.com/bajos-worsening-drinking-water-issue/>

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=163831>

¹⁸¹ <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=156429>

CONCLUSION

There is an immediate need to intervene for safety of the women and young girls and protect them from sexual harassments, rapes, family violence and abuses. All girl children have every right to live in safety and peace. Failing to provide such support is a direct violation of the Convention the Right of the Child of which Bhutan is signatory to.

The other important issue needing government attention is creating opportunity for young people. Bhutan's future lies on import of skilled foreigners rather than exporting manpower. Every graduate entering the job market is pillar for prosperous future of the country. They must remain in the country – let the country's economy not rely only on remittance.

Despite the constitutional mandate to keep 70 percent of the land under forest cover to preserve environment, the crisis is creeping in. Growing water scarcity is an example for this.

Bhutan changed names of many places in southern Bhutan in late 1990s with the intention to eliminate the history of Nepali speaking Bhutanese who dominantly live there. In our reports, we use the current names to make it easy for our readers searching for details about Bhutan today. However, we have produced list of places who names have changed. In many places, village borders in a block were realigned or sub-divided into multiple villages. The list is not comprehensive. Any feedback and support in completing the list is welcome.

Appendix

Names of the places changed by RGOB since eviction of southern Bhutanese in 1990s.

Chukha district

Blocks		Villages	
Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
	Darla	Bich Darla	Dangreyboog
		Bich Saureni	Tagthanboog
		Lower Saureni	Khaemedtagthang
		Ghamdanda	Nyimgang
		Gurung Gaon	Rinchhentse
		Barkhay	Chumaedlakha
		Pakshina	Pagshhingang
		Samachin	Samarchen
		Silley	Sillangsa
		Sankhu	Sharphug
	Loggchina	Chadokha	Chagdokha
		Dubeni	Dupanang
		Chimuna A	Chimongna Ka
		Chimuna B	Chimongna Kha
	Phuentsholing		Bosokha
		Serina	Gangteng
		Balden Danda	Pachuthang
		Pachu Danda	Pachudrag
		Pachu Tar	Pachugang
		Ahalay	Dophugchhen
		Ramitey	Wangdue Gatshel

Samphelling	Chilauney	Marpji
	Chomchey	Deling
	Behitar	Rinzingling
	Pekashey	Pekarling
	Ahalay	Tshochungna
	Burkhay	Khatoed
	Ghumauney	Dungkarling
	Gurung Danda	Phurpaling
	Malbasay	Karmaling
	Singi	Sengyegang
	Daragaon	Thongling
	Khaibatar	Khepaithang
	Kothiline	Sonamthang
	Pana A	Pangna
	Pana B	Pangna
	Pana C	Pangna
	Ragaytung	Bamenmo
	Dhungayna	Doruphug
	Pakchina	Pedshelnang

Tsirang (Chirang) district

Blocks

Villages

Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
	Barshog	Gairigaon A	Barshong Maed
		Gairigaon A	Barshong Toed
		Baradhurey	Chunyikhang
		Dandagao	Gangtokha
		Gairigaon B	Gairai gang Kha
			Toitshang

Doonglagang	Bichgaon A	Dangrayboog Toed
	Bichgaon B	Dangrayboog Maed
	Khorsaney	Kirithang
	Gopini	Lamoi Loongma
	Lalikharka	Norjangsa
Gosarling	Gairigaon A	Phuensoomgang
	Upper Suntoley	Dzamling Zor
	Lower Sungoley	Pemathang
	Upper Lobsibotey	Pelrithang
	Lower Lobsibotey	Dzamlithang
Kikhorthang	Lower Salami	Tashiyangjong
	Upper Salami	Nyizergang
	Majuwa	Sa-Tshangma
	Lower Bokray	Dekidling
	Mithun	Maenchhana
Mandrelgang	Majigaon	Dzamling Zor
	Manikhola	Dzamling Zor
	Sarkigaon	Dzamling Zor
	Sarkigaon	Pemashong
	Manidanda	Samshing Gaden
	Lamidanda	Mandrelgang
	Rateykhola	Riserboo
	Kamigaon	Riserboo A
	Kamigaon	Riserboo B
	Gurunggaon	Tashipang

Patshaling	Thangray	Thakorling
	Bhulkay	Chhuzomsa
		Patshaling Toed
		Patshaling Maed
	Katley Kalikhola	Tshakaling
	Pakhay	Pangthang
	Kaligaon	Munyulsa
	Dhanesay	Jakhor
Punthenchu	Phaledey	Serzhong
	Kharkhola	Menchhugang
	Manitar	Norbuthang
	Saureni	Drongtod
	Budichu	Tashicholing
	Dhansiri	Penjorling
	Jogitar	Wangthangling
	Sangay	Chhubapsa
	S/Melay	Dragithog
	T/melay	Tonghigang
	Baithakey	Goenteg-Kha
	Dhapkhola	Dhodomchen
		Unknown
Rangthangling	Sauney	Dawthongsa
	Ghagagaon	Gagaling
	Herabotey	Nyimajor
	Chanaute	Rangthangling
	Jhulpagaon	Charingma
	Nevarey	Neymedsa

	Dhajey	Darchhargang
Semjong	Kokrey	Dekidling
	Dandagaon	Dangraygang
	Kattikay	Dzomling
	Badarey A	Tashiling Maed
	Badarey B	Tashiling Toed
Sergithang	Majgaon	Norbugang
	Upper Sergithang	Sergithang Toed
	Lower Sergithang	Sergithang Maed
	Pataley Tar	Tashithang
	Teoray	Samdenjong
Tshonglingkhar	Tintalay	Gomsoom
	Lower Chhokana	Tsholingkhar Maed
	Upper Chhokana	Tsholingkhar Toed
	Alaichey	Alenchi
	Harpaypani	Drupchhugang
	Kapazing	Tsholingkhar
Tsirang	Dauthrey	Wangphu
	Simpani	Chhuboelsa
	Bhaktar	Tangthang
	Tshering Toe	Kabelzhing
		Tsirang Toed
	Zhingay	Zoomma
	Salleri	Tongsigang
	Bauri	Dungkharling
		Damtshang

Dalleni

Soentabsa

Dagana district

Blocks		Villages	
Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
Dorona		Sanu Dorona	Dorona Chhoongwa
		Thulo Dorona	Dorona Chhewa
Goshi	Gozhi	Goshi	Gozhi
			Gozhi Maed
			Gozhi Toed
Karmaling		Deorali	Labtsakha
		Homa	Omchhu
		Dalbari	Senchumthang
		Labrang	Ganglingna
		Kerabari	Karmaling
		Balabas	Pemathang
Khebisa		Paksey	Pagser
Kalikhola	Lhamoi Dzingkha	Lamchey	Majathang
			Tsaemjeena
		Devitar	Tsaemjee-Gosa

	Sibsooni	Chongsamling
	Kalikhola	Lhamoidzingkha
	Dandagaon	Loongsila
	Majigaon	Kuendrelthang
Nichula	Katarey	Dramzekesa
	Suntoley	Tsheluthang
	Solmoley	Yarpheling
	Basiney	Nyeltshosa
	Manglabarey	Lakpaling
		Nichula
	Allay	Damchhunang
	Bichgaon	Dangreyboog
	Apgachi	Omchhugang
	Dandagaon	Gangtokha
Tashiding		Shamdolay
	Hattikharka	Langchhenthang
	Lodoma	Norbuling
	Gopini	Gangyeb
Tshangka		
	Bandar Khola	Rongchhu
		Zinchila
	Buddhey Khola	Satsamchhu
	Tisgharey	Gongpa-Soomchhu
		Patekha
		Babythang

Tsendagang	Suntoley	Tsendagang
		Gangzur
	Salaree	Gangzur Maed
	Shamdolay	Gangzur
	Panakhola	Gangzur
	Pasebung	Gangzur Toed
		Dharey
	Majuwa	Yuebug
		Norbuzingkha
	Panakhola	Norbuzingkha
	Samakhola	Samarchu
Tseza		
	Tongzho	Tongshong

Sarpang (Sarbhong) district

Blocks

Villages

Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
Danabari	Chhuzagang	Danabari	Chagsakhar
		Dawathang	Chagsakhar
		Kalikhola	Chagsakhar
		Limbutar	Chagsakhar
		Samitar	Chagsakhar
		Thewar	Chagsakhar
		Danabari	Pengzor
		Dandagaon	Pengzor
		Kalikhola	Pengzor

	Upper Phunphuney	Pengzor
	Dandagaon	Chaskar
	Dandagaon	Nyimaling
	Lower Phunphuney	Nyimaling
	Dandagaon	Shawapong
	Lower Phunphuney	Shawapong
	Danabari	Yueling
	Dandagaon	Yueling
	Lower Phunphuney	Yueling
	Dandagaon	Zambabi
	Danabari	Tongjabi
	Lower Phunphuney	Tongjabi
	Lower Phunphuney	Tshojan
	Dandagaon	Barthang
		Tshojan
		Zambabi
Chhudzom	Bimirey	Tshelithang
	Dandagaon	Samtenphu
	Gairigaon	Chhibigang
	Ghungring	Galegthang
	Ramitey	Pelrigang
	Baragharey	Chunyithang
	Khargaon	Norbugang
	Mongargaon	Mongarling
	Pathibhara	Sherabling
	Tarkharka	Thongjabi
	Fedi	Rjugang
	Tirkhola	Dragchhu
	Dovan	Chudzomsa

		Pankhey	Jangchhubling
		Maukhola	Mautsangchhu
		Bichkhola	Bachhuthang
		Machukhola	Nyachhu
		Nunpani	Dechenling
		Ranikhop	Azhethang
		Maogaon	Lhayuel
Leopani	Dekidling	Bichpani	Mandelgang
		Chuwabari	Jigmed-Ling
		Gairigaon	Dolongang
		Rateygang	Menchhuthang
		Rateypani	Dekidling
		Dolpani	Nubgang
		Toribari	Chhoe-Khorling
		Sukhatar	Darbithang
		Leopani	Dekidling
		Leokhop	Hamlingphu
		Sukhatar	Lungtenbi
		Sukhatar	Dabithang
		Lampatey	Tahiling
		Kafletar	Gawaithang
		Kafletar	Norbuthang
		Kafletar	Yangchenphu
Hiley	Gakidling	Belkhola	Balchhangchhu
		Gangatey	Dragphuchhen
		Kharpani/Hiley	Maenchhulam
		Muga	Jachhu
		Rateypani/Hiley	Sangkha

		Nunpani	Reilangthang
		Kagatey	Chursini
		Laring	Getemha
		Bisty	Bunakha
		Hiley	Gakidling
		Kwapani	Omchhugang
Gaylegphug	Gelephu	Lodrai	Pelrithang
		Samitar	Pelrithang
		Mainatar	Pelrithang
		Mainatar	Dzamlingthang
		Lakitar	Lekidthang
		Samitar	Pemathang
	Jigmechhoeling	Babjungay	Tagjogang
		Dhungay	Doringphu
		Gairigaon	Hokaling
		Guangdanda	Gongtsekha
		Mongargaon	Moenchhukha
		Ashiney	Sorbugang
		Bhirgaon	Mandrelgang
		Guang Gaon	Gongduegang
		Kholatar	Gakidling
		Reti	Riti
		Galechu	Galegchhu
		Samkhara	Shingkharthang
		Chakpai	Tashigatshel
			Chungsing
		Bichgaon A	Bartsham Ka
		Bichgaon B	Bartsham Kha

		Dandagaon	Khamaed
		Beteni	Pachhakha
		Saudalay	Jungchhugang
		Sirangaon	Khatoed
		Ossey	Silsagang
		Tatopani	Tshachhu
		Pakhey	Pemagang
		Sukumbassi	Chhotenkhar
		Tormey	Tormaphoog
Bhur	Samtenling	Dungmindra	Khengpagang
			Dungkharling
		Bhur	Samtenling
		Jhuprey	Samtenthang
		Jhuprey Danda	Samtenthang
		Jaruwa	Dechelpelri
		Majuwa	Chhokorling
Sershong	Serzong		Shershong
		Thewar	Barshong
		Samitar	Kapung
	Sompangkha	Kharey Pakhey	Gomchakha
		Chaar	Gomchaka
		Tinjurey	Risoomgang
		Kharpanitar	Koenchogling
		Pakhey gaon	Thongjazor
		Sarbhang Bazar	Gadanchholing
		Sarbhangtar	Shompakha
		Patabari	Baryethang

		Akhow	Norbugang
Singhi	Seng Gey	Labarbotey	Tashitse
		Sistykhopan	Rishong
		Phibsoo	Wangchulingkhar
		Pingkhuwa	Chiwaling
			Singhi
		Balatung	Sahariphu
		Kopchey	Penjorling
		Thomba	Yarpheling
		Chota Chirang	Yuejug
		Deorali	Labtsakha
		Sisty	Nyenyul
Taklai	Tareythang	Kharsechholing	Tashichholing
		Rangdanda	Yoedzergang
		Dandagaon	Pemacholing
		Chargharey	Dorjitse
		Limbutar	Wangchhilu
			Tashitchholing
Lalai	Umling	Chisopani	Chubarthang
			Tashithang
			Thongjazor
		Dhodey	Dangling
		Katusey	Dangling
		Baraytar	Dungmin
		Bawanitar	Dungmin
		Bichpani	Dungmin
		Bistadanda	Dungmin

Gobretar	Dungmin
Gurungtar	Dungmin
Salbandi	Dungmin
Bistadanda	Lingar
Langkhar	Rajoog
Tamkuley	Rajoog
Proper Lalai	Gaden
School Danda	Gaden
Upper Lalai	Gaden
Upper Lalaidhap	Gaden

Samdrup Jongkhar district

Blocks

Villages

Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
Deothang	Dewathang		
	Langchenphu	Kharbandi	Chelthang
		Khowrong	Rongchuthang
		Aguritar	Agorthang
		Daldalay	Damtsang
		Malbasay	Pagshingkha
		Nanglay	Dewathang
		Daifam	Jomoshangkha
			Jampani
		Lower Hastinapur	Langchenphu Maed
		Upper Hastinapur	Langchenphu Toed
		Bajhrangi	Namchazor
		Betholi	Aumshing
		Lower Golanti	Jangsawom

		Upper Golanti	Jangsawom
Dalim	Pemathang	Deorali	Labtshazor
		Diklai	kathoobdang
		Kataray	Dungkharling
		Majuwa	Banakha
		Nalapara	Yuwathang
		Nainital	Uesarna
		Tarulay	Lingmayshong
		Warang	Warong
		Beldanda	Pemathang
		Dalim	Pemathang
		Gairitar	Loongminang
		Kharbandi	Chirtshosa
		Kharbandi	Pyertshosa
		Phedi	Raling
Bakuli	Phuenthogthang	Jagartala	Thongjialing
		Koila	Selmonang
		Nakalitar	Balamnang
		Tekree	Minjigang
		Kataray	Karmaling
		Kubinday	Drupchhugang
		Majuwa	Tshokhorling
		Raitar	Samdrupchhoeling
		Saureney	Thongsigang
		Chotaytar	Thangchugonpa
		Bakuli	Phuenthogthang
		Upper Mansitar	Tshangchutham
			Baylamsharang

Sukuni	Shangshingzor
Gauthalay	Chhumaedthang
mansitar	Khamaedthang
bauney	Tshochhong
Bhawanay	Mendrupling
Daurey	Chhoetyung
Gangatay	Doongkharling
Katikay	Zomlaythang
Samrang	
Satpokhari	Tshodoem
Hillay	Damsagang Maed

Samtse (Samtse) district

Blocks		Villages	
Old Name	New Name	Old Name	New Name
	Doongtoed	Dandagaon	Doomtoed
		Khaling Gaon	Khaling
			Gairigaon
		Thulo Dun	Doomtoed Chhewa
		Kuchey	Kuzug gang
		Jaringay	Jarikha
		Sanu Dun	Doomtoed Chungwa
	Dhopoogchen	Dandagaon	Gantogkha
		Mithun	Bamengang
		Somlachen	Mizomsa
		Tarigaon	Aringgang
		Bichgaon A	Dangreyboog Ka

	Bichgaon B	Dangreyboog Kha
	Chelumchen	Chilumchen
	Damphuchen	Ngagang
	Dorokha A	Dokarkha Ka
	Dorokha B	Dokarkha Kha
	Dorokha C	Dokarkha Ga
	Basantay	Chhukha
	Maney	Manigang
	Timburey	Thingyversa
	Dogap	Dograp
	Lapchay Gaon	Legpagang
	Satakha	Tendeltshog
		Sengteng
		Sangloong
	Sebichang	Melongang
	Thulung Gaon	Thulung-gang
		Jigme
		Singye
		Wangchuk
Duenchukha	Benekha	Benyekha
		Poongthra A
		Poongthra B
	Dhamilay	Drameling
	Mayona	Yomeling
	Dhamilay	Mayona
	Boribotey	Gesarling
	Denchukha	Duenchukha
	Bhalukhola	Domchhukha
		Relukha

		Sethakha
	Baseni	Gawaling
	Beteni	Phazhing
	Demjee	Damji
	Kadori	Kharzing
	Khempa	Khempaling
Namgaychoeling	Gyanthok	Gangtok
	Kholakharka	Sarnyagang
	Pokhari Danda	Tsholingkhar
	Hangay/Lahreni	Namgaycholing
	Malbassay	Pagshingkha
	Noonpani	Tshachhugang
	Rangaydanda	Tshosarling
	Choksa	Chhodagling
	Kalikhola	Chhunagang
	Majuwa	Sa-Tshangsa
	Rajarukh	Gyalpoishing
Norbugang	Lamjee	Lambi
	Lamjumsa	Lamjosa
	Nangla Dang	Tshering Gang
	Kothi Danda	Gangtosa
	Kataray	Dramzegang
	Hatkhola	Tshongdukha
	Maghay	Dawaling
	Bhimtar	Yangphilthang
	Gairigaon	Madgang
	Dhapper	Kyitshaling
	Dipujora	Damzagsha

	Thumkey	Thorila
	Tintaray	Norbugang
	Nabukharka	Tsalphel Thang
	Kopchey	Khangduzhi
	Kirney	Kyidsa
	Kothi Danda/Kirney	Kyed Sa
Norgay gang		Tshachhu
		Chongzhu
	Chingu	Chhu Goo
	Fenchi	Phendegang
		Noryog
	Thika	Khababgang
		Joempang
	Lingtam	Linggarnang
	Majuwa	Satsangma
	Beteni	Patshaling
	Bichgaon	Dangrayboog
	Ghundagaon	Guengaling
	Mukheni Gaon	Zhendebgang
	Dhakal Gaon	Migphelgang
	Kami Gaon	Karmaling
	Lepcha Gaon	Samphelgang
	Lower Bara	Norgaygang
Pemaling	Ahalay	Damtshangna
	Bimirey	Balsathang
	Birukhola	Tamchhabsa
	Birutar	Thangchenang
	Chhetritar	Chhujugthang

Dhengrey

Ngadoongsa

Ghondaytar

Pagsamthang



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