



GoI provides a grant of Nu 1.204-billion for key development projects

Sonam Penjor

Indian Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj handed a cheque of Nu 1.204-billion (b) to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Tandi Dorji, for the smooth functioning of various development projects in the country on 9 March.

These projects are spread over diverse sectors inter alia health, education, culture, cottage and small industry development, livestock enterprise development, and infrastructure. This grant is part of the Project Tied Assistance (PTA) committed by the Indian government under the 12th Plan period.

A press release from the Indian Embassy in Thimphu states that a major part of this grant amounting to Nu 667.88-million

(m) will be spent on improving the quality and access to education for the children living in the remote parts under the "Existing Central School" project.

This project strives to enhance the facilities in various central schools and aims to provide economies of scale in terms of resource allocation. It is being implemented by various Dzongkhags and Thromdes across the country.

The GoI will also be providing funds to the tune of Nu 149.49-m under this grant towards the procurement of medical equipment for Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital. The amount would be utilized to purchase and upgrade medical equipment for the hospital for improved service

delivery, reduced referral cost, speedy diagnosis, and treatment.

For accelerating the growth of cottage and small-scale industries in the country, the press release further added that a dedicated marketplace has been set up at Changzamtog in Thimphu and a common service center is being developed. Funds have been earmarked in this grant for the renovation of the marketplace and procurement of necessary equipment.

Similarly, for the development of livestock enterprises in Bhutan, funds have been allocated to improve livestock breeds, facilitate access to markets, and introducing new livestock production technologies.

Major infrastructure

projects such as reinforcement of bridges on Samtse - Tashichhoeling road and improvement of Jamtsholing road would be included under this grant amount. Further, the money will also be spent on the development of infrastructure in the College of Language and Culture Studies in Trongsa, College of Natural Resources in Punakha, and the Samtse College of Education.

It also states that the fund has also been earmarked for the preservation and restoration of Lingzhi Dzong and the Sanghen Monastery. These works would include the creation of sanitation, water, and electricity supply facilities for improving the living conditions of the monasteries.

Meanwhile, for the 12th

Plan period, GoI has committed financial support of Nu 45-b comprising Nu 28-b of project tied assistance, Nu 8.5-b of assistance towards high impact community development projects, and Nu 8.5-b of program grant assistance.

Since the start of the 12th Plan, India has released Nu 22.05-b to date, which is 49 percent of the total commitment? To mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, GoI has provided early releases of Nu 5.01-b from the committed development assistance since March 2020.

The press release states that the people and the government of India stand resolutely committed to the long-term well-being and prosperity of the Bhutanese people and their government.

Taklai irrigation channel maintenance to complete soon

While farmers awaits for water discharge

Sangay Rabten | Gelephu

The maintenance work of the Taklai irrigation channel now in full swing and will complete soon. The canal network, considered being a lifeline of the agriculture sector for the people of Chuzargang and Sershong gewogs is in bad shape at many points.

Taklai irrigation channel needs renovation at various places. Its plasters at various places have also peeled off. There requires refurbishing the canal.

As a result of the deterioration of the canal system over the years, there is seepage and flow off of water from the points of the damaged drain, reducing the water-carrying capacity of the channel considerably.

Employing the local labourers, the maintenance work is done by community contractors. The work started in December 2020 and water was stopped since then. Meanwhile, farmers growing vegetables are waiting for water release soon.



The seven kilometer irrigation channel can irrigate a gross area of over 2900 acres of paddy fields benefiting around 398 households of two gewogs under Sarpang Dzongkhag

There is a need to cement the inner walls, besides the removal of silt from the canal beds.

A member of the community contractor committee, Pema Tshechi from Chuzargang said that the Taklai irrigation channel is like the blood-line of villagers of Sershong, especially to the people of Chuzargang. He said that the channel is gravely in need of renovation.

He said, "It seems that channel has been used for 30 years with no proper major maintenance. It is important to do maintenance at the right time knowing the intensity of effect before the drain is damaged."

He said that if there is no

maintenance beforehand, "it would incur a huge financial cost to rebuild and also the livelihood of farmers will be miserable."

Nima Norbu from the same village said that the irrigation channel not only necessary for paddy cultivation during the summer but also necessary for vegetable cultivation during the winter. "Now farmers are facing difficulties with insufficient water for their gardening as the water was stopped since December last year," he said.

He said that the renovation was supposed to finish earlier, but the national lockdown stuck it.

Trying and contributing to their best towards the socio-economic develop-

ment of the villages in the gewog, Nima Norbu and Rinchen Dorji from Chuzargang said that they are working hard to renovate the channel at the earliest when the government supports with a budget.

The chairperson of the community contractors' committee Penjor said they have been renovating the channel for the past three months and "we hope to handover the sites by March-end."

He said that the channel was constructed in the 1970 to 80s and it has been used for a long without maintenance. "There are water leakages at various places reducing the volume of water which further adds to the water shortage in the villages. This is the right time to renovate," he said.

Mangmi of Chuzargang gewog, Leki Wangchuk said that meanwhile water for vegetable farming is distributed from the old irrigation channel and it is pumped by machine to the places where water cannot be distributed directly from the channel.

The renovation of the channel will be done round wise and for this year, around two kilometers will be renovated. The work can be done only in winter before the paddy plantation.

Officials from gewogs, dzongkhag, and members of Taklai irrigation water users association have studied the nature of renovation and cost. The team has proposed a budget of Nu 60-million.

The government had sanctioned Nu 5-million for the renovation of the irrigation channel from the water flagship program for the first round, fulfilling a long-felt need of farmers.

The largest irrigation system in the country, the Taklai irrigation channel was constructed in the 1980s, and the rehabilitation of the irrigation project was financed through grant aid from the Japanese government in 2015.

The seven-kilometer irrigation channel can irrigate a gross area of over 2,900 acres of paddy fields benefiting around 398 households of two gewogs.