



India continues to aid Bhutan's developmental endeavors



Wangdue Phodrang Dzong being restored to its glory

STAFF REPORTER Thimphu

To promote export of agricultural and processed food products, including fresh fruits and vegetables, animal products, rice, and organic products, the Indian Embassy organized a virtual meeting between Bhutan and the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority of India (APEDA) as a follow-up to previous interactions between the two sides on 21 March.

The meeting provided an opportunity for the two sides to discuss further avenues of collaboration through enhancing bilateral trade, organic sector development, and capacity-building opportunities.

In the context of the year 2023 being declared as the International Year of Millets at the United Nations General Assembly, the press release from the Indian Embassy states that the two sides also

discussed ways to meet the demand in Bhutan for millets, which are cereal crops with high nutritional value produced in India.

India is the world's largest producer of millets with over one-third share of overall global production.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj said, "Notwithstanding the scourge of the pandemic, India remains committed to extending full support to enhance and sustain its long-term partnership with Bhutan in the key sector of agriculture cooperation."

The event was attended by senior officials from the government including the Director for Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture and Forests, Yonten Gyamtsho, as well as representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Economic Affairs.

Other participants included officials from the National Organic Flagship

Program, National Centre for Organic Agriculture, Department of Agriculture Marketing and Cooperatives, Bhutan Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Food Corporation of Bhutan Ltd., and Horticulture Association of Bhutan.

On the Indian side, it was attended by representatives from the Indian Embassy led by the Ambassador to Bhutan, and representatives from APEDA including Chairman Dr M. Angamuthu, Director Dr Tarun Bajaj, Secretary Dr Sudhanshu, General Manager, U.K. Vats, and General Manager V.K. Vidyarthi.

Update on Wangdue Phodrang Dzong Reconstruction

Meanwhile, a press release from the Indian embassy stated that the ongoing Wangdue Phodrang Dzong Reconstruction Project, funded by the GoI,

is progressing well and will be completed soon as per the set deadline.

The press release stated that the aim of the project is to "build back better" with the incorporation of disaster-resilient features for fire and earthquake safety, without losing the essence of traditional construction techniques and cultural heritage values.

The GoI-funded project is being implemented by the Department of Culture, under the Ministry of Home and Culture Affairs.

The key components of the project include reconstruction of three-storied Kuenrey (Lhaxhang), four-storied Utse (central tower), Shab-khor (surrounding structure) in the 1st and 2nd courtyard, Du-Khang (Lhaxhang), and the construction of a 50-meter long service tunnel in both courtyards.

During the entire construction of the project, special efforts were made to maintain Bhutanese essence and architectural

elements.

Further, a dedicated team of local artisans has handcrafted and designed intricate murals showcasing the culture and traditions of Bhutan.

"The Government of India is privileged to be a part of this magnificent Project. India has provided funding for Nu 1,000-million to the Project, which is 94 percent complete and is expected to be completed by June 2022, one year before the original project completion date," the press release, "the

Indian embassy said the restoration of this majestic Dzong to its splendor is a testament to the unique ties between Bhutan and India characterized by mutual respect, trust and friendship.

The Dzong was damaged in a fire incident in June 2012 following which the reconstruction works were taken up as a bilateral Development Partnership Project between India and Bhutan in 2014.