#### **CHAPTER 7: TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION**

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bout two and half decades back, Bhutan had fragmented transport and communications network. An efficient road system for a landlocked country assumes paramount importance as it plays a crucial role in supporting all development activities and in stimulating domestic and international trade. The first appearance of the motor vehicle was in 1962 and surface transport continues to be the main means of transport. The Bhutan Government Transport Service (BGTS) originally entrusted with goods transportation was restructured to concentrate on passenger transport. In 1985 the gradual privatization of the public transport services was achieved in 1990 with 21 operators managing a fleet of more than 100 buses on 73 routes. The Government in order to promote and see the development of surface transport, with emphasis on safety, formulated Roads Safety and Transport Act, which became operational since October 1997. In the last 25 years, tremendous achievements were made in establishing 3746 kilometers of roads and several motorable bridges. In the difficult areas where the construction of motorable road has not yet begun, suspension bridges provide the vital transport links. Today the Division of Roads is responsible for the design and planning of roads and insetting standards for quality.

Druk Air, the national airline commenced providing services in the February 1983 and commercialized in 1985. Bhutan established its international air links with Kolkata and today it flies to five destinations in the region. The Division of Civil Aviation was established in 1986 to provide infrastructure and services and to regulate the airline industry. The Civil Aviation Act was enacted in 1990 and the Division of Civil Aviation became the member of ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization), which adheres to internationally accepted standards and practices. The Paro International Airport was inaugurated on 10 April 1999 and has taken the air transport sectors further ahead in providing the reliable, safe and comfortable travel services.

Within the last two and half decades, telecommunication network has changed from physical wire network to a national digital network. Telecommunication has been accorded high priority in Bhutan’s development plans. Bhutan’s first satellite international link was established in 1990 with the installation of Earth satellite station and an international gateway switch in Thimphu. In September 1993 the telecommunication link between Thimphu and Tsirang was established and in March 1999 all the 20 district headquarters had access to telecommunication services. Within the period 1992-1999 the number of telephones per 100 people increased from 0.08 to 1.12.

Following the formulation and implementation of Bhutan Postal Act of 1996, Division of Post was incorporated under Bhutan Companies Act. There are 107 postal services where one post office caters to around 6145 Bhutanese people. In 1993, Bhutan post introduced International Express Mail Service and after a year Domestic service was started in 1996 followed by Post Overnight Courier and Bhutan Post Express Passengers Services in 1997. Within a short period, Bhutan Post increased the types of services from 4 to 13.

The recently completed national telecommunication network opened the path to global information network. On 2nd June 1999, the country established the first television network and also started the Internet Services. Since then, the information and communication technology such as Internet provides access to global information and plays an important role in the every day affairs.