**BHUTAN**

**Location and Extent**

Bhutan is a small and landlocked country, situated between China *(Tibet)* and India. It has an area of 38,394 square kilometers. It has east-west dimension (longest) stretching around 300 kilometers and 170 kilometers at its maximum north-south dimension. Bhutan is located in the Eastern Himalayas and is mostly mountainous and heavily forested. It shares 470 kilometers long border with Tibet *(China's Xizang Autonomous Region)* in the north and northwest, 605 kilometers with the Indian state of Sikkim in the west, West Bengal in the southwest, Assam in the south and southeast, and Arunachal Pradesh in the east.

About 70 percent of the Kingdom is covered with forests; 7 percent with year-round snow and glaciers; nearly 3 percent is cultivated or agriculture areas and 4 percent as meadows and pastures, while rest of the land is either barren, rocky or scrubland.

**Relief and Surface Features**

Bhutan is one of the most rugged mountain terrains in the world. It has elevations ranging from 160 meters to more than 7,000 meters above sea level. Bhutan's highest peak Jhomo Lhari, overlooking the Chumbi Valley in the west, is 7,314 meters above sea level.

In the north, the snowcapped Great Himalayan Range reaches heights of over 7,500 meters above sea level and extends along the Bhutan-China border. The northern region consists of an arc of glaciated mountain peaks with an arctic climate at the highest elevations. Alpine valleys in this region provide pasturage for livestock tended by a sparse population practicing transhumance.

The Inner Himalayas are southward spurs of the Great Himayalan Range. The Black Mountains, in central Bhutan form a watershed between two major river systems, the Mo Chhu and the Drangme Chhu. Peaks in the Black Mountains range between 1,500 meters and 2,700 meters above sea level and the fast-flowing rivers have carved out spectacular gorges in the lower mountain areas. The woodlands of the central region provide most of Bhutan's valuable forest production. Eastern Bhutan is divided by yet another southward spur. Western Bhutan has fertile, cultivated valleys and terraced river basins.

In the south, the Southern Hills or Siwalik Hills, are covered with dense deciduous forest, alluvial lowland river valleys and mountains that reach to around 1,500 meters above sea level. The foothills descend into the subtropical plain.

**Climate and Vegetation**

The country is divided into three distinct climatic zones: alpine, temperate and subtropical zone. Bhutan's climate is as varied as its altitudes and like most of countries in Asia, it is affected by the monsoons. The climate is humid and subtropical in the southern plains and foothills, temperate in the inner Himalayan valleys of the central regions, and cold in the north, with year-round snow on the main Himalayan range.

Temperatures vary according to elevation. Most of the central portion of the country experiences a cool, temperate climate year round. In the south, a hot, humid climate helps maintain a fairly even temperature range of between 15° C and 30° C year-round, although temperatures sometimes reach beyond 35° C in the valleys during the summer.

Annual precipitation ranges widely in various parts of the country. In the severe climate of the north, there is only about forty millimeters of annual precipitation--primarily snow. In the temperate central regions, a yearly average of around 1,000 millimeters is more common, and 7,800 millimeters per year has been registered at some locations in the humid, subtropical south, ensuring the thick tropical forest. Thimphu experiences dry winter months (December through February) and almost no precipitation until March, when rainfall averages 20 millimeters a month and increases steadily thereafter to a high of 220 millimeters in August for a total annual rainfall of nearly 650 millimeters.

Bhutan's generally dry spring starts in early March and lasts until mid-April. Summer weather commences in mid-April with occasional showers and continues through the early monsoon rains of late June. The summer monsoon lasts from late June through late September with heavy rains from the southwest. The monsoon weather, blocked from its northward progress by the Himalayas, brings heavy rains, high humidity, flash floods and landslides and numerous misty, overcast days. Autumn, from late September or early October to late November, follows the rainy season. It is characterized by bright, sunny days and some early snowfalls at higher elevations. From late November until March, winter sets in, with frost throughout much of the country and snowfall common above elevations of 3,000 meters. The winter northeast monsoon brings gale-force winds down through high mountain passes.

There is a pronounced difference in the vegetation cover in three different zones of the country and it is mostly due to the prevalence of varied climatic conditions across the kingdom. The southern foothills are mostly covered by the dense and thick deciduous trees while the inner regions are dotted by an infinite variety of plants, flowers and trees including birch, pine, chestnut, oak, apples, peaches and plums are also grown in the fertile valleys. The northern part with the tundra type of climate allows the growth of coniferous trees and other alpines growths like magnolia, rhododendrons, birch, fir, spruce etc… The vegetation is overall expression of various ecological factors, and it is one of the basic analytical tools for developing and understanding the mountain environment.

**Drainage Pattern**

Fed by fresh snow each winter and slow melting in the summer, the glaciers bring millions of liters of fresh water to Bhutan and downriver areas each year. Bhutan has four major river systems: the Drangme Chhu; the Puna Tsang Chhu; the Wang Chhu; and the Amo Chhu. Each flows swiftly out of the Himalayas, southerly through the Duars to join the Brahmaputra River in India. The largest river system, the Drangme Chhu, flows southwesterly from India's state of Arunachal Pradesh and has three major tributaries: the Drangme Chhu, Mangde Chhu, and Chamkhar Chhu. These rivers form the Drangme Chhu basin. In the Duars, where eight tributaries join, the Drangme Chhu is called the Manas Chhu. The 320-kilometer-long Puna Tsang Chhu rises in northwestern Bhutan as the Mo Chhu and Pho Chhu, which are fed by the snows and glaciers from the Great Himalayan Range. They flow southerly to Punakha, where they join to form the Puna Tsang Chhu, which flows southerly into India's state of West Bengal. Wang Chhu, which is 370 kilometers flows southeasterly through west-central Bhutan and drains Haa, Paro and Thimphu valleys. It then continues through the foothills, before it finally drains into West Bengal. The smallest river system, the Torsa Chhu, known as the Amo Chhu in its northern reaches, flows swiftly through western Bhutan before broadening near Phuntsholing and then flowing into India. Glaciers in northern Bhutan, which cover about 10 percent of the total surface area, are an important renewable source of water for Bhutan's rivers.

## Government

On 17th December 1907, the civil and monastic representatives unanimously crowned Ugyen Wangchuck as the first hereditary monarch of Bhutan. It was the strength and the farsightedness of Ugyen Wangchuck that for the first time Bhutan was united under a central authority providing the country with stability and opportunity for development. In 1926 his son Jigme Wangchuck succeeded Ugyen Wangchuck. The third Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck began a campaign of modernization and expansion of Bhutan's government and society based on the accomplishments of his two predecessors in uniting the country under a strong central authority. Hence, the National Assembly consisting of representatives of the people, the Monastic order and civil administration was established in 1953.

The fourth Druk Gyalpo, Jigme Singye Wangchuk became the King in 1972. There had been steady decentralization of decision-making and institute building since then. His Majesty’s philosophy of Gross National Happiness guided Bhutan into the 21st century. The most momentous change in the structure of the government came in 1998 after the devolution of the executive power by His Majesty the King to the Council of Ministers. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo initiated the drafting of Bhutan's first Constitution in 2001 and was eventually enacted in 2008. The King abdicated the throne in favour of the crown prince in 2006.

The fifth Druk Gyalpo, His Majesty King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck acceded to the throne on December 14, 2006 and was crowned on November 6, 2008. Democracy begin in march 2008 with Prime Minister as the head of the from the ruling political party.

## Administrative System

The administrative system in the country consists of Central Government and Local Government. The Central Government comprises of Ministries, Departments and Autonomous bodies. The Local Government comprises of Dzongkhag Tshogdu, Gewog Tshogde and the Dzongkhag Thromde Tshongde.

In order to plan and review the development activities most efficiently in the Dzongkhag, the Dzongkhag Tshogdu was established in 1981. The Dzongkhag Tshogdu compromises of elected representatives of the people with its chairman elected among the Gups. Similarly, the Gewog Tshogde was established in 1991 to further decentralize the decision making process. The Gewog Tshogde comprises of Gup, Mangmi and Tshogpas. The main role of the Gewog Tshogde is to plan, prioritize and implement the developmental activities in their respective Gewogs.

**The National Assembly**

The National Assembly (Gyelyong Tshogdu) consists of 47 members who are elected representatives from the 47 Constituencies. The main functions of the National Assembly are to enact, amend or repeal laws and approve the national budget. The National Assembly also reviews and approves the Five Year Plans which are formulated by the government in consultation with the people of every Dzongkhag. It also deliberates on issues that affect the security and well-being of the country and promotes the welfare and happiness of the people. The National Assembly meets twice a year. However, if an important and emergency matter demands, special sessions of the National Assembly may be convened by the speaker. The duration of the National Assembly session is governed by the nature and scope of the points for discussion received from the people. A session normally lasts about three weeks. The speaker is the presiding officer of the House and is assisted by a Deputy Speaker. The day to day administration of the National Assembly rests with the secretariat which is headed by a secretary.

## The National Council

## The National Council was established in 2008 under Article 11 of the Constitution of Bhutan. There are 25 members of which 20 are elected by the people from 20 Dzongkhags and the remaining 5 are nominated by His Majesty, the Druk Gyalpo. Their tenure is for five years which commences from the date of the first sitting. The main functions of the National Council are to:

## Ensure that the government safeguards the interest of the nation and fulfills the aspirations of the people through public review of polices and issues, bills and other legislation, and scrutiny of state functions.

1. Act as the house of review on matters affecting the security and sovereignty of the country and the interests of the nation and people that need to be brought to the notice of His Majesty, the Druk Gyalpo, the Prime Minister and the National Assembly.

The National Council meets twice a year. However, special sessions may also be convened depending upon the needs. The chairperson, who is elected from 25 members of the National Council is the Presiding Officer of the House, and is assisted by a Deputy Chairperson. The National Council has seven working committees; namely the *House Committee, the Legislative Committee, the Economic Affairs Committee, the Social & Cultural Affairs Committee, the Natural Resources and Environment Committee, the Good Governance Committee and the Foreign Relation Committee*. Each committee has a minimum of seven members headed by a chairperson who is elected from the seven members. The National Council is assisted in the discharge of its parliamentary functions by a secretariat which is headed by a secretary general.

## The Monastic Body

The Monastic Body comprises of the Central Monastic Body and the Rabdeys (Dzongkhag Monastic Body). The Central Monastic Body receives annual subsidy from the Government to manage and run its day to day affairs. The Monastic Body is the sole arbiter on religious matters. The Je-Khenpo (Chief Abbots) is the head of the monastic body and is responsible for the nation’s religious affairs. He is chosen from among high ranking monks. Apart from being thoroughly versed in all branches of religious scholarship and practice the candidate must also have undergone prolonged mediation. The present Je-Khenpo Trulku Jigme Chhoeda is the 70th in succession. He was appointed in 1996.

The Je-Khenpo is assisted by five high-ranking Lopens (masters) viz. Dorji Lopen *acts as Deputy Je-Khenpo and the chief of all Lopens (masters)*, Yangbi Lopen *heads the liturgical division inclusive of Sacred Dances, Rituals Arts, and Metrical Ryhme*, Drabi Lopen *heads Lexicographical division that includes literature, grammar, lexicon, metrics and prosody,* Tshenyi Lopen *heads the division of Metaphysics and Logic* and Tsugla Lopen *is responsible for the higher studies of the monastic Body.* There are also monastic bodies in the Dzongkhags headed by Lam Neeten. He is assisted by Umzey, Kudrung and the lopens (teachers) of different areas.