

Embassy of India
Thimphu

Bhutan - India cooperation in Healthcare

To keep the body in good health is a duty, for otherwise we shall not be able to trim the lamp of wisdom, and keep our mind strong and clear - Lord Buddha

For communities and nations to prosper, the physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being of its people is of utmost importance. The tenets of Buddhism lay emphasis on the inseparable connection between the mind and body – the complex interactions that take place between thoughts, body, and the outside world. The *Sangye Menlha* or Medicine Buddha has a special place in the *Mahayana* and *Vajrayana* traditions of Buddhism. It is no surprise that Bhutan's conception of Gross National Happiness includes Health as a key domain area.

Bhutan - India cooperation in healthcare is diverse and multi-faceted ranging from construction of health facilities, support to government schemes, procurement and supply of specialised equipment and provisioning of medicines and kits. For Bhutan's 11th Five Year Plan, a *150 - bedded Central Regional Referral Hospital* was constructed at *Gelephu*, two *40 - bedded District Hospitals* were constructed at *Samtse* and *Tsirang* and a *Public Health Laboratory (now known as the Royal Centre for Disease Control)* was inaugurated in *Serbithang*.

At present, Government of India is providing support for the Construction of a *150 - bedded Mother and Child Hospital* within the *Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (JDWNRH)*, Thimphu. The hospital will help ease the patient case load on JDWNRH and will facilitate in delivering focused and effective intervention for improving the health outcomes of mothers and children in the region. Another key project of the Royal Government, the *65 bedded Gyaltshuen Jetsun Pema Mother and Child Hospital at Mongar*, started construction in June 2021. Being supported by the Government of India, this hospital will be equipped with advanced medical equipments for Intensive Care Units and Operation Units and will provide regular and specialised health care services to the mothers and children from the eastern *Dzongkhags*.

From India's committed development assistance for the 12th Five Year Plan of Bhutan, projects are being implemented to replace and upgrade the existing medical facilities. In *Dewathang*, a *40 - bedded hospital is being constructed*, which will replace the existing Dewathang hospital and serve as the District Hospital of *Samdrup Jongkhar*. In

Dechencholing and Tashichhoeling, the existing Basic Health Units (BHUs) are being replaced by two 20 - bedded hospitals. In *Nganglam*, a 20 - bedded hospital is being constructed which will also serve as a referral centre for other health care centres within *Nganglam Dzongkhag* and other *Gewogs of lower Pema Gatshel and Mongar Dzongkhag*.

Besides constructions of healthcare facilities, Project Tied Assistance is being provided by India to the Royal Government's *Health Flagship Program*. The program endeavours to reduce the incidence of gastric, cervical and breast cancers in Bhutan and includes training of health workers, setting up of outreach camps and procurement of medical equipments. Since 1965, Bhutan and India have worked closely to eliminate Malaria through *National Malaria Control Program*. Since 10th Five Year Plan, Government of India is providing support to the *Vector Borne Disease Control Program* to reduce the incidence of other vector borne diseases in the country. Another project for *Procurement of Medical Equipment for Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital* is also being implemented bilaterally between Bhutan and India to provide state of the art equipments to the hospital.

To help Bhutan mitigate the effects of COVID-19, India has provided support to Bhutan through the supply of Covid - 19 relief material including PPE Kits, N-95 Masks, RT-PCR Test Kits, Essential Medicines and Vaccines. In May 2021, Six Portable X-Ray Machines were gifted by India to Bhutan. India is also collaborating with Bhutan for strengthening clinical trial research capacity.

India's support to the health sector of Bhutan is a reflection of the special bonds of trust and understanding between India and Bhutan that have existed over decades. Going forward, India will continue to extend all possible support to Bhutan for the health and well - being of the people of Bhutan.

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