

# BHUTANESE

## COMMUNITY PROFILE

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This booklet has been compiled by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship to help state and territory governments, service providers and other key settlement stakeholders to settle new entrants under Australia's Humanitarian Programme.

Accurate information about the pre-arrival experiences of refugees, including environmental conditions in camps, can be difficult to obtain and verify. While every effort has been made to ensure this document is factually correct, it may contain some inaccuracies.

Refugee experiences can vary considerably between individuals. Readers should note that this document is intended to provide a general background of the possible experiences of arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme. Information presented here may not always be applicable to individuals within the community in Australia or to new arrivals.

Where possible, more detailed information on specific groups of arrivals will be provided to service providers as an adjunct to this and other community profiles.

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The information provided in this document does not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government or its employees.



## Introduction


Bhutan is located in the remote Eastern Himalayas. It is a small land-locked country that has common borders with China to the north, the Indian territories of Assam and Western Bengal to the south and east, and Sikkim to the west.

Bhutan's early history is obscure. Most forms of historical records were destroyed by fire, earthquakes, flood and warfare. However, there is some archaeological evidence that the country was inhabited as early as 2000 BC, including stone tools and weapons and remnants of large stone structures. Artefacts indicate that Bonism (the belief that all beings in the universe have souls) was practiced before the introduction of Buddhism in the seventh century AD.

Prior to the early 1600s there was no unified force within Bhutan. In the middle of the fifteenth century a Tibetan lama and military leader, Shabdrung Ngawang Nangyal, created the first unified and independent nation of Bhutan. In addition, he established a dual system with a political or administrative leader and a spiritual leader. After the Shabdrung's death civil war broke out and for the next 200 years the unity that had been earlier created began to disintegrate.

Border conflicts with British India began in the eighteenth century, culminating in the Duar War (1864-1865). A signed treaty between Bhutan and British India resulted in the concession of land to Britain in exchange for an annual payment.

After a series of Buddhist rulers and years of warring among independent monarchies, Ugyen Wangchuck defeated a number of political enemies and united the country. In 1907 he was chosen as King of Bhutan. The British Government recognised the new monarchy. The Wangchucks have continued to rule the Kingdom of Bhutan. In December 2006 King Jigme Singye Wangchuck suddenly abdicated and handed the throne to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.



A census in 1988 identified many ethnic Nepalese living in Bhutan as illegal immigrants. At the same time the Royal Government began to enforce citizenship laws and stressed its Tibetan-based Bhutanese culture. These actions further alienated the minority Nepali community living in the south of Bhutan. By 1990 there was turbulent ethnic unrest as, in particular, Nepali-speaking Bhutanese fought for greater respect of Nepali rights. The ensuing violence led more than 100 000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese to seek refuge in eastern Nepal. These people have been confined to seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal since that time. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has recently completed a census of the camp populations in order to begin planning for large-scale resettlement and other durable solutions for the Bhutanese refugees.

Australia has agreed to resettle Bhutanese refugees from Nepal under the Humanitarian Programme over a number of years as part of a coordinated international strategy to resolve this long-standing situation. It is expected that the majority of Bhutanese entrants settling in Australia will come under the Refugee category of the Humanitarian Programme.



## Bhutanese community in Australia

The Bhutanese community in Australia is very small – the 2001 census identified 63 Australian residents who were born in Bhutan (38 males and 25 females). However, through the Australian aid programme a number of Bhutanese have undertaken tertiary education in Australian universities including a significant number of Bhutanese government ministers and senior government administrators. Australia has also supported a number of development programmes in Bhutan through its aid programmes.

Over the past 10 years (1997 – 2006), the department's Settlement Database has recorded only 24 entrants to Australia who were born in Bhutan. Of this group approximately 30 per cent arrived as humanitarian entrants, 30 per cent as family and 40 per cent arrived under the skill stream.

Of the 24 arrivals, main languages included English, Nepali and Hindi. Some spoke languages from the Indo-Aryan language group however 48 per cent of arrivals did not identify their main language.

Of the arrivals who stated or recorded a religion the majority identified Hinduism as their religion (52 per cent). Buddhism was the only other religion identified although it was a very small proportion. The remainder did not identify a religion.

## Pre-arrival experiences

The current Bhutanese refugees being identified for resettlement in Australia have been living in seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal since the early 1990s. Approximately 106 000 refugees reside in the camps. The refugees are primarily Bhutanese Lhotshampas – descendents of the Nepalese who moved to the southern lowlands of Bhutan in the nineteenth century. On the whole, these Hindu Lhotshampas did not integrate with Bhutan's majority Buddhist population.

The camps are clean and presentable. The people live in basic huts with earth floors. In general, the families are large and so there is no privacy in the huts. Sanitation is adequate and a regular supply of drinking water maintained.



A refugee camp in south-eastern Nepal

UNHCR

The camps are fringed by banana trees. Primary food supplies include rice, pulses, vegetable oil, sugar, salt and unilito (green or yellow vegetables and a fortified blended food). Seasonal vegetables and ginger are common. Families grow vegetable gardens to supplement their food rations and use solar cookers.

There are schools in the camps and therefore access to education is good. Some students go outside the

camps to attend school. Most children aged five to 17 years attend refugee-managed primary and secondary schools. The ratio of teachers to students is about 1:35. Nepali, Hindi and English are spoken in class.

All camps offer some skills development training for women including cotton weaving, tailoring, reading centre, women in micro business, micro credit, loan scheme, gender sensitisation, and social awareness. Each camp has

a children's forum and a disability centre that teaches sign language and lip reading skills. Many of the camps have a Bhutanese Community Development Centre for non-formal education, particularly for language classes in Nepali, English and Dzongkha. There is also some vocational training for vulnerable groups.

All of the camps have primary healthcare centres. Some health considerations are communicable childhood illnesses, nutrition, sexual and reproductive health and mental health issues. Hospital facilities are limited with visiting doctors. More serious cases are referred to hospitals outside the camps. A UNHCR-supported hospital provides voluntary counselling and testing services in all the camps. Intensive care is given to elderly tuberculosis patients and malnourished children under five. There is also a 24-hour ambulance service provided by AMDA (Association of Medical Doctors of Asia – Nepal). Clinical services are in place to educate residents about HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Humanitarian entrants to Australia undergo medical screening prior to being granted a visa.

The groups of entrants likely to be referred for resettlement in Australia are reported to be very spiritual and will require access to religious support and places to worship. As the majority of the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal are Hindu, they would most likely not eat beef and many may be vegetarian.



Community water pump in camp

UNHCR



Solar cooker in camp

UNHCR



UNHCR banner announcing the camp census *UNHCR*

The majority of camp residents dress in a western style.

UNHCR has recently started to promote resettlement for the most vulnerable groups in the camps and has completed a census of the camp populations in order to begin planning for large-scale resettlement and other durable solutions. Most of the refugees have some form of documentation – birth and marriage certificates and proof of education.

Camp residents have experienced long term uncertainty and frustrations with finding a durable living solution. Domestic violence, alcoholism and crime have increased over time.

# UNHCR camp profiles

There are seven refugee camps in south-eastern Nepal:

- Sanischare
- Beldangi I
- Beldangi II
- Beldangi II Ext
- Khudunabari
- Timai
- Goldhap

## Sanischare camp

The Sanischare Camp is located 15 kilometres west of Damak, approximately 25 minutes by car. It was established in April 1992. As of October 2006 there were 2790 families living in the camp (21 275 people).



UNHCR camp locations in southern Nepal UNHCR

Figure 1. Camp population age and gender October 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	4	19	24	2	49
Male	4	19	25	3	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

There is one preventive basic health unit and one curative health centre. Referrals are made to local hospitals outside of the camp.

There are 12 schools with a teacher to student ratio of 1:42. They offer seven schools with classes from pre-primary to grade 3, four schools with classes from grades 4-6, and one main/secondary school for grades 7-10.

## Beldangi I camp

This camp is located seven kilometres north of Damak. It is approximately 10 minutes drive from Damak. The camp was established in May 1992. As of June 2006 the camp population consisted of 2524 families (18 440 people).

Figure 2. Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	4	17	25	3	49
Male	4	28	26	3	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>

There is one basic preventive health unit and one curative health centre. Referrals are made to outside hospitals.

There are nine schools, four schools for pre-primary classes to grade 3, four schools for grades 4-6 and one main/secondary school for grades 7-10. There is a teacher to student ratio of 1:47.

## Beldangi II camp

The camp is located eight kilometres north-west of Damak. It is about 15 minutes drive from Damak. The camp was established in July 2002. As of June 2006 there were 3358 families living in the camp (22 610 people). The population is almost equally made up of male and female residents (49 per cent female and 51 per cent male). Fifty-three per cent of the camp population is aged 18-59 years.

Figure 3. Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	3	17	26	3	49
Male	4	17	27	3	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>

The camp has one preventive health centre and one curative health centre. Referrals are made to outside hospitals.



There are nine schools in this camp – four schools for pre-primary to grade 3, three schools for grades 4-6, and two schools for grades 7-10. The teacher-student ratio is 1:35.

### Beldangi II (extension camp)

The camp is located eight kilometres north-east of Damak, approximately 15 minutes drive from Damak. The camp was established in November 1992. As of June 2006 there were 1672 families living in the camp (11 664 people).

**Figure 4.** Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	3	16	27	3	49
Male	4	17	27	3	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>

This camp has one health centre with referrals to outside hospitals.

There are five schools offering classes from pre-primary to grade 10 with a total of 3768 students. The ratio of teacher to students is 1:33.

### Khudunabari camp

The Khudunabari camp is located 49 kilometres north-east of Damak and is about a 60 minute drive by car. It was established in April 1993. As of June 2006, the camp had a population of 1960 families (13 418 people).

**Figure 5.** Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	4	18	25	3	50
Male	3	17	26	4	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>

There is one preventive health centre and one curative health post with referrals to local hospitals.

There are two schools with one offering classes from pre-primary to grade 6, and the other for grades 7-10. The teacher to student ratio is 1:34.

### Timai camp

Timai Camp is located 50 kilometres from Damak, about a 65 minute drive by car. The camp was the first of the camps to be established. It was established spontaneously by refugees in 1991. As of December 2006 the camp population was 1390 families (10 513 people).

**Figure 6.** Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	4	18	25	3	49
Male	3	17	26	4	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>

The camp has one preventive reproductive health centre and one curative health centre. Referrals are made to outside hospitals.

There are three schools – one offering pre-primary to grade 6; one offering grades 7 and 8 and another with grades 9 and 10. There is a total of 3620 students and 121 teachers for a teacher to student ratio of 1:30.



## Goldhap camp

The Goldhap camp is located approximately 40 kilometres from Damak, a 60 minute drive by car. The camp was established in June 1992. As of October 2006 the camp population was 1348 families (9555 people).

**Figure 7.** Camp population age and gender June 2006 (%)

Age (yrs)	0 - 4	5 - 17	18 - 59	60+	Total
Female	4	18	25	3	50
Male	3	17	26	4	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>

This camp has one preventive health centre, one promotive maternal health centre and one curative health centre.

There are two schools in Goldhap Camp for 2777 students with a teacher to student ratio of 1:30. The main school offers classes to grade 8 while the second school offers classes for pre-primary to grade 6.

## Settlement considerations

The entrants coming out of the camps in Nepal are a diverse group of people. Many have spent more than 15 years in the camps. While some speak English, many will require language assistance, particularly older residents. As many entrants have spent considerable time with limited educational and work opportunities, they are very anxious to have these opportunities in their settlement location. Some of them are well educated and have aspirations for study and work.

Schools in camp are taught in English. However, the students' proficiency remains fairly basic and they may have challenges in an English language environment. Older residents may have basic English language skills but this cannot be assumed. All of the refugees speak Nepali. A minority may speak Dzongkha as a second language. The children have Dzongkha language classes in school.

Where arrivals have spent a considerable amount of time in camps they may lack work skills and experience. Over the years there have been many skills classes and vocational training offered. However, even those with transferable skills will be unfamiliar with the nuances of the Australian industrial landscape and may not understand Occupational Health and Safety (OH & S) and other workplace issues.

Some arrivals have experienced torture and trauma and this may manifest as post-traumatic stress or depression. Feelings of displacement, confusion, grief, loneliness and lack of control over life choices may be present. These people may benefit from support through specialised counselling.

The Hindus are reported to be very spiritual and may benefit from contact with established Hindu communities and a place to worship. Although the majority of camp residents are Hindu, there are also Buddhists and a small number of Christians and Kirats (an indigenous faith blending Hindu and animist faith with Buddhist practice).

The camp residents are concerned about having the right to freely practice their religion after strict restrictions in Bhutan.



# Bhutan country background

## Location

Bhutan is located in southern Asia in the Eastern Himalayas, bordered to the north by China and by India on all other sides. It has a rugged, mountainous terrain with some fertile valleys and savannah that covers approximately 47 000 square kilometres. Bhutan is comprised of three regions: Western Bhutan, Central Bhutan (where the Black Mountains separate Western Bhutan from Central Bhutan) and Eastern Bhutan. The lowest point is Drangme Chhu at 97 metres and the highest point is Kula Kangri at 7553 metres.



Map of Bhutan

*World Factbook*

The city of Thimphu has been the capital of Bhutan since 1952 when the National Assembly was established. It has a population of 60 000. It is situated in a valley at an altitude of 2400 metres. The city is a blend of modern culture and ancient traditions.

## Climate and topography

The country consists of rugged mountains and deep valleys. The Himalayan mountain range lies to the north with peaks reaching more than 7000 metres high. The central uplands and Himalayan foothills support the majority of the population.

There are three climatic zones: subtropical in the southern plains, temperate in the central regions (cool winters and hot summers), and alpine in the north with severe winters. Storms from the Himalayas are frequent in the winter with landslides during the rainy season. The southern tip of the country consists



Kang Bum Peak in the Eastern Himalayas  
*Rogier Gruys www.bluepeak.net*

mostly of tropical plains. Only 2.3 per cent of Bhutan is arable land and most of it is in the south.

Bhutan has four distinct seasons. Spring is the most agreeable time of the year with winter being fiercely cold. Monsoon rains occur in June, affecting the south and central regions. Temperatures vary according to elevation, with summer temperatures in the capital city ranging from 15°C to 26°C and from minus four to 16°C in winter. Temperatures in the north are cooler, while the south has a fairly even range of 15°C to 30°C year round.

## Population

According to the CIA World Factbook, as of November 2006, Bhutan's population was approximately 2.3 million. However, estimates vary markedly and the CIA quotes other figures as low as 810 000 (July 2006). Average life expectancy at birth was approximately 55 years (slightly higher for males than females). A large proportion of the population were young – around 39 per cent were under 15 years. The median age was 20.4 years and the infant mortality rate around 98 deaths per 1000 live births.

**Figure 8.** Bhutan age distribution, 2006 (%)

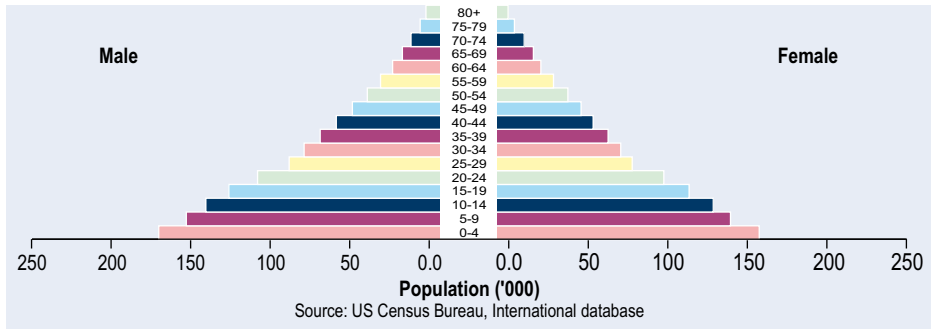
Age (yrs)	0 - 14	15 - 64	65+	Total
Per cent of population	38.9	57.1	4	100

The following table provides comparisons between Bhutan and Australia and demonstrates the difference in age distribution and life expectancy between the two countries.

Figure 9. Comparison of population between Bhutan and Australia

Country	Population growth	Life expectancy	Infant mortality	Median age
<b>Bhutan</b>	2.10%	54.78 years	98.41/1000 live births	20.4 years
<b>Australia</b>	0.85%	80.50 years	4.60/1000 live births	36.9 years

Figure 10. Bhutanese population age and gender distribution in thousands (2007)



## Ethnicity

Bhutan's population consists of four broad groups: the Ngalop, the Sharchop, the Lhotshampas/Nepalese, and several aboriginal peoples.

The Ngalop (also referred to as the Bhote) inhabit the north and west regions of Bhutan. They are people of Tibetan origin and although they are not the largest ethnic group, they dominate the politics and culture of modern Bhutan.

The Sharchop are an Indo-Mongoloid people who are thought to have migrated from Assam (India). They are the largest ethnic group and many of them speak Assamese or Hindi. The Sharchop are believed to be Bhutan's earliest settlers.

The Lhotshampas are descendents of the Nepalese who in the nineteenth century were the last migrants to arrive in Bhutan, settling in the south and south east of Bhutan. These people are primarily Hindus. Since 1958 it has been illegal for Nepalis to migrate to Bhutan, the ban introduced due to fear of Bhutan becoming over populated with Lhotshampas/Nepalis.

There are also a number of small aboriginal tribes. These tribes are scattered in villages throughout the country. These tribes comprise approximately seven per cent of the entire population.

Although the principal ethnic groups are identified, they are not necessarily exclusive. Assimilation and intermarriage over time have blurred the lines of distinction between groups. In addition, readers should note that reporting of Bhutanese ethnicities and numbers varies from source to source.



Prayer stone with Tibetan script  
*Steve Evans*

## Language

There are three main languages spoken in Bhutan: Dzongkha, Sharchopkha and Nepali. The people of the north speak various Tibetan dialects while the people of the south speak various Nepali dialects. In eastern Bhutan people speak Sharchopkha. There are numerous other dialects spoken throughout the country, particularly in isolated communities.

Dzongkha is the official language of Bhutan and is the language spoken in the monasteries which were established to protect and defend Bhutan in the seventeenth century. The language is similar to Tibetan and is usually written in Tibetan script. There are 19 dialects of Dzongkha. Dzongkha is taught in schools, although students can speak both Dzongkha and English, with English taking precedence (most subjects are taught in English). All government documents are in Dzongkha and in English. The national newspaper is written in Dzongkha, English and Nepali.

## Family and gender

Traditionally marriages were arranged on the basis of family and ethnic ties although it is now more common practice to choose a partner based on mutual attraction. Again traditionally, the newly married couple would live with the parents who had the greatest need for help with labour on the family property or with the family business. If neither family needed assistance the couple would be free to set up their own household.

Although the practice of polygamy (having more than one spouse) has been restricted since the mid-twentieth century, a man is still allowed up to four wives if his first wife consents. Divorce is permitted in Bhutanese society and new laws provide for better arrangements for women who seek alimony.

The extended family is very important in Bhutanese culture and grandparents often look after younger family members. Bhutanese families are typically self sufficient, and make their own clothes, bedding and decorative items. These items are made from local wool and silk and imported cotton. Women have woven the raw materials throughout the centuries and continue to do so today. Men and women work together in the fields or in small businesses.

## Religion

The official religion of Bhutan is Buddhism and approximately 70 per cent of the population practice some form of Buddhism. Bhutanese Buddhism originated from Tibet but has developed and changed over the centuries. It has been supported financially by the government and has been assured an influential voice in public policy.

Buddhism plays an important role in Bhutanese society. Temples, monasteries, shrines, prayer flags and prayer wheels are common sights. Prayer flags are placed along paths to ensure good fortune, prosperity and a better rebirth after death.



Prayer flags

*Chris Campbell*



Young monks *Rogier Gruys* [www.bluepeak.net](http://www.bluepeak.net)

Hinduism is also a recognised religion – up to one quarter of the population are of Nepali ethnicity and practice Hinduism. The majority of these people live in the south of Bhutan. Up to five per cent of the population practice Islam. Christianity is very rare.



Women dressed in traditional 'kira'  
*Steve Evans*

### Dress

Today men and women wear traditional dress in Bhutan. A national dress code is in force during daylight hours, although this is enforced more rigidly in some regions than in others. The traditional dress for men is called 'gho' and is a heavy knee-length wrap-around garment that is worn with a belt. Women's traditional dress is a 'kira' which is an ankle length dress made out of a rectangular piece of fabric. It is held at the shoulders with a clip and a belt holds it in place at the waist. A long sleeved blouse is worn under the garment. A 'toego', a short silk jacket, can be worn over the kira. Colours and decorative detail are indicative of social status. Both men and women sometimes wear shawls and scarves as well as earrings. Everyday clothing is made from cotton or wool which the women weave. For special occasions clothing may be made of silk.

When visiting a dzong (a religious or social centre) or a temple Bhutanese people are expected to wear a sash, the colour determined by gender or social status. White is worn by ordinary citizens.

### Food

Bhutan's food staples include rice (boiled or steamed) and corn. White rice is called 'ja chum' and pink rice, 'eue chum'. Protein sources include a variety of meat, vegetables, poultry and fish. In the uplands, yak cheese is part of the diet. Spicy chillies called 'ema' and cheese called 'datse' are blended with vegetables and meats to flavour much of the cuisine. Chilli and curry dishes are very common.

Butter tea (known as 'suja') and 'ara' (a spirit made from rice, wheat or corn) are common beverages consumed widely throughout Bhutan.



Diet is influenced by religion. The Hindus eat no beef while the ethnic Indian and Nepalese are mostly vegetarian, eating no meat at all.

Since late 2004 smoking in public venues and the sale of tobacco have been banned in Bhutan. Although smoking was not prevalent in Bhutanese society, chewing tobacco was quite common.

## Health

Common health concerns in Bhutan are malaria, teenage pregnancy and general health and hygiene. HIV is present although not prevalent. Poverty and living in temporary or semi-permanent housing contribute to the spread of malaria. The poorest cannot afford to buy bed nets for the whole family. Those who live in locations that are isolated are also highly vulnerable to malaria during the rainy season.

Tuberculosis is a health concern although exact numbers of cases are difficult to determine as sources vary greatly. Tuberculosis is more prevalent among the poor. Bhutan's National Tuberculosis Control Program (NTCP) targets the poor and provides free tuberculosis treatment to 70 per cent of the population.

## Education

Bhutan has a literacy rate of 47 per cent for the total population with 60 per cent literacy for males and 34 per cent for females (figures as of 2003). Bhutan has a national plan in place to achieve a range of development, sustainability and educational goals, in particular to increase access to education and to improve the quality of education. One of the biggest challenges is reaching children from poor families in remote areas. The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) supports a World Food Programme project in Bhutan which provides food assistance to the poor in an effort to increase the number of children from this demographic sector enrolling and remaining in the school system.

Australia provides scholarships to Bhutanese students in areas of governance, health, education and natural resource management. There are currently approximately 30 Bhutanese students studying in Australian institutions. It is expected that these students will return to their country to enrich it by taking leadership roles in their fields upon return.

## Economy

Bhutan is considered one of the least developed countries. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report in 2005 ranked Bhutan 134 out of 177 countries. This index measures life expectancy, educational levels and income.

Bhutan's economy is based on agriculture and forestry. Approximately 90 per cent of the population is involved in either of these two sectors. Industry is underdeveloped and slow to adopt technological changes. Much of production is done through cottage type industry. Industry engages about two per cent of the population while services provide employment for five per cent of the Bhutanese. Tourism is a recent development although the government is highly protective of the country's environment and cultural traditions. Until 1974 tourists were not allowed into the country.

Bhutan's principal export destination and import source is India. Its main export product is electricity from the Chukha hydropower project. It also exports gypsum, timber, cement, handicrafts, precious stones, apples and spices. Imported products include fuel, cereal, rice, machinery and mechanical appliances and plastic and rubber products.

The Government of Bhutan has established a Five Year Plan (2002-2007) to deal with pressing social issues. In particular, this plan has the following five goals:

- Improving quality of life and income, especially the poor
- Ensuring good governance
- Promoting private sector growth and employment generation
- Preserving and promoting cultural heritage and environment conservation, and
- Achieving rapid economic growth and transformation.

This plan aims to expand services such as education and health and to strengthen the economy, particularly through increased employment in the private sector.

Bhutan relies heavily on international assistance and receives approximately US\$78 million per annum from foreign aid, India being the main source.



## History

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a small, mountainous and isolated country. Little is known about the early history of the country prior to the twelfth century. Most records were destroyed in a fire in Punakha, the ancient capital, in 1827. There is, however, archaeological evidence to suggest that Bhutan was inhabited from 2000 BC.

Numerous clans and nobility fought for control and rulers changed accordingly until the twelfth century when Bhutan was colonised by various Tibetan Buddhist religious orders. Shabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a Drukpa Kagyu lama from Tibet, is considered the founder of present day Bhutan and was the first to unite the valley kingdoms in 1616. Ngawang Namgyal also established a dual system of government whereby control of the country was shared by the spiritual leader and an administrative leader.

Following his death in 1651 the country fell into political confusion. Conflict ensued with Tibet and Sikkim until an armistice was signed in 1759.

Territorial conflicts also occurred between Bhutan and the southern kingdom of Cooch Behar (now part of India) during the eighteenth century. In 1772, after Cooch Behar enlisted the help of the British East India Company, the Bhutanese agreed to retreat and signed a treaty with Cooch Behar. However, border conflict continued over the next hundred years culminating in the Duar War (1864 - 1865). Bhutan lost the war, signing a further treaty with British India that ended hostilities.

During the 1870s and 1880s there was renewed competition among regional rivals. One predominant rival, Ugyen Wangchuck of the district of Tongsa in Bhutan, defeated his political enemies and emerged as the national leader of the country. Following a series of civil wars from 1882 – 1885, Wangchuck gained further control of the country when in 1903 Bhutan ceased to have a spiritual leader. In 1907 a new absolute monarchy was established and Ugyen Wangchuck was elected as Bhutan's first hereditary King. This monarchy continues to the present day.

In 1910 Bhutan signed a treaty with British India, establishing a protectorate and handing over Bhutan's foreign relations to British India. India gained

independence from Britain in 1947 and in turn granted independence to Bhutan in 1949, although India maintained some influence over foreign affairs.

### Political

The monarchy of Bhutan is an absolute monarchy; there has never been a constitution. The King of Bhutan is also the head of state. Although the King has absolute power, the Lhengye Shungtson (the council of ministers) is responsible for the day to day running of the country. There are no legal political parties.



Bhutanese flag

Jigme Dorji Wangchuck, the third dragon King of Bhutan, succeeded the throne in 1952. He slowly began the modernisation of Bhutan, taking steps towards democracy and abolishing feudalism and slavery. He established the National Assembly and in 1968 formed the Cabinet. Jigme Dorji Wangchuck died suddenly in 1972 leaving his son, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, to accede to the throne at a young age. Jigme Singye Wangchuck was officially crowned in 1974 and continued to modernise Bhutan with a focus on preserving its unique culture.

The Nepalese had come to Bhutan in the late 1800s and early 1900s seeking improved economic prosperity through farming and collecting timber from the forests. During the British colonial era Nepalis (mostly Hindu) were encouraged to migrate to Bhutan and neighbouring Sikkim (both Tibetan/Buddhist cultures) to develop the agriculture industry which was largely based on traditional



subsistence farming at the time. From the 1950s Nepalis in Bhutan were granted citizenship and had representation in the Bhutanese National Assembly. Over time the ethnic Nepalese population grew to become almost one-third of the Bhutanese population.


In the 1970s and 80s the government introduced a range of laws to preserve Bhutan's cultural identity. Bhutan was conscious of its porous borders, small population density, abundant natural resources and free education and health services, in contrast to its heavily populated neighbours. The government also perceived Nepali growth as a threat to national unity.

These laws required all citizens to wear the traditional clothing of the northern Bhutanese in public places. Dzongkha was identified as the national language and taught in schools. The Nepali language ceased to be taught as a subject in schools in 1989. In addition, those who could not provide proof of residency prior to 1958 (the year that Bhutanese of Nepalese descent were granted citizenship) were deemed to be illegal immigrants. Ethnic tensions became evident between Nepali speakers in southern Bhutan and the rest of the country.

Pursuant unrest with changes in government policy and the resulting violence led to more than 100 000 Nepali-speaking Bhutanese refugees fleeing to Nepal where they remain living in seven UNHCR administered refugee camps.

Since 1993 there have been several meetings between Bhutan and Nepal to discuss the refugee situation. However, assimilation and/or repatriation have not been considered acceptable options by current governments. It is only recently that there has been agreement to allow some of the most vulnerable cases to be resettled.

In an effort to move towards democracy, the King set up a committee to prepare a constitution in 2001. In 2003 the King received a second draft constitution from the committee. The redrafted constitution was publicly unveiled in March 2005. Under the new constitution there will be two houses in parliament: the National Assembly and the National Council. The King would remain the Head of State but parliament would have ultimate power over the King. The constitution is currently awaiting a national referendum which is aimed to be finalised by 2008. The country is also preparing for the first ever elections in 2008. The new constitution will replace the royal decree of 1953.



In mid-December 2006, King Jigme Singye Wangchuck handed over his power to his son, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk. King Jigme Singye Wangchuck surprised the nation by abdicating before 2008 when he had originally planned to give up his power. The new young King has promised to continue his father's efforts to bring the country of Bhutan to democracy.

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