



PRESS RELEASE

India and Bhutan: Strengthening a Unique Relationship

New Delhi, April 23, 2015: Exemplifying their historical ties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay chose Bhutan and India as the destinations for their first respective foreign visits recently. Broadly, the spread and depth of the bilateral relationship draws from, and is driven by, the national interests including political, economic and security aspects of both countries which are closely linked to each other.

The relationship encompasses a diverse agenda covering a rich tapestry of cooperation, including several major recent developments taking prominence in Hydropower, Education, Skill Building and Border Management. In keeping with the changing times, the two countries are must find a new trajectory to enhance this unique relationship further in the contemporary context and take it to the next level.

Reflecting on these aspects, the conveners of the India-Bhutan Strategic Dialogue (Track II)—Ananta Aspen Centre, The Thimphu Seminars and Royal Institute of Governance and Strategic Studies (RIGSS)—hosted a special discussion on deepening the relations between the two countries. **Dasho Karma Ura**, *President, Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research*; **Ms. Namgay Zam**, *Freelance Journalist*; **Amb. Shyam Saran**, *Chairman, Research & Information System for Developing Countries (RIS) and Senior Fellow, Centre for Policy Research* and **Mr. Ravi Singh**, *Secretary General & CEO, WWF-India* participated in the discussion.

Stressing that India and Bhutan shared special and long-standing ties, **Amb. Saran** said it was important to nurture the relationship and not take it for granted. *“Our region and economies are going through a major transformation and there are new issues that are emerging, like ecological degradation and impact of climate change. Still, there are very few issues that divide India and Bhutan.”* **said Amb. Saran.** *“Borders should be connectors and not dividers, and the India-Bhutan border is a characteristic example of one such boundary. Yet I feel far more needs to be done on the Indian side of the border to enhance connectivity with Bhutan,”* **he added.**

Responding to a query on China as a factor in India-Bhutan ties, **Amb. Saran asserted,** *“It is up to India and Bhutan to see how they develop their relations with China. But both are sensitive to each other’s concerns with respect to China.”*

“The relationship between India and Bhutan is akin to that of a gentle colossus and very beautiful bird. But within the seeming asymmetry between a colossus and a beautiful bird, a few things will not change: one, the peace and security of the Northeast, within which Bhutan is also mapped. Bhutan has contributed to peace and stability in the area. And the other, is the prosperity of the Northeast region as a whole,” **said Dasho Karma Ura.**

“A lot of young Bhutanese aspire to be global citizens. Perspectives of a young Bhutanese depends on the access to information, especially on social media. Information is now available on the fingertips. We tend to look at India, as India, and not specific states or region. In many ways, the youth in Bhutan has homogenised India,” **said Namgay Zam.**

“There are tremendous cultural, ecological and religious relations between India and Bhutan. Our Strategic Dialogue seeks to bring these aspects together,” **said Ravi Singh.**

Sandwiched between two Asian giants, India and China, Bhutan is a landlocked nation with a population of over 700,000 people, out of which 68% are subsistent peasants. With a GDP of Rs 113 billion, Bhutan’s major economic activities are agriculture, hydropower generation, construction and tourism.

About Ananta Aspen Centre

An independent and not-for-profit organization, Ananta Centre – formerly part of Aspen Institute India – is registered under the Indian Trust Act. It engages the civil society, inclusive of business, NGOs, Governments and other stake holders on issues of importance to India’s development and national security. Ananta Centre holds discussions on key foreign policy issues as well as security matters and strategic affairs pertaining to India through regular public sessions and round tables. The Centre is based in New Delhi.

For more information, contact:

Mr Samarth Pathak

Cellphone: +91-9811347927

Email: Samarth.pathak@anantacentre.in