

Bhutan's big jump 1985-09

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25 May, 2009 - Bhutan has made tremendous progress in socio-economic development in the last 24 years, says a study by the national statistical bureau (NSB). The report titled 'Comparative socio economic indicators for Bhutan,' compares the gross domestic product (GDP), revenue and finance, health, education, agriculture, transport and communications of March 2009 with 1985.

"Looking at the figures, we started with almost nothing and now we can compare with other countries in the South East Asian region," said NSB director, Kuenga Tshering.

He said that Bhutan was doing especially well in areas like health and education, compared to other countries, which took longer. "Though some may say we had an advantage of being a small country, we also had no resources," he said.

GDP has increased from Nu 2,392m in 1985 to Nu 51,521m now. The director said that this huge leap was due to Bhutan starting from a small base with developments like hydropower, tourism and other economic activities.

This is also supported by the fact that, although agriculture is still growing, its share of GDP has fallen from 53 percent to 18.1 percent.

"This means that other sectors of the economy are growing and there is more developmental activity."

The total government revenue has increased to Nu 11,608m, up from Nu 233m in 1985 with hydropower contributing the most. At the same time, government expenditure has increased proportionately.

Under health, the average life expectancy has jumped from 47.5 to 66.3 today and infant mortality rates have decreased from 142 to 40.1 per thousand. At the same time, the birth rate has reduced from 39.1 to 19.7, indicating better family planning; while a drop in death rate from 19.3 to 7.1 per thousand indicates better medical care.

"This has been made possible due to an increase in health infrastructure and access to it," said the director.

The rural population's access to piped water has increased from 14 percent then to 89.6 percent now. Another impressive jump has been in education 176,483 students are enrolled in school today, compared to 51,835. "This has been due to better access to education and a change in the mindset of the people, who now consider education a must".

In an effort to connect every dzongkhag and gewog, the road network has increased from 1,755 km to 5,362 km. With all this developmental activity comes prosperity and, as Bhutanese earn more, the number of light vehicles has jumped.

In 1985, there were only 1,880 telephone connections but, in a growing aspiration to be connected, today there are 26,850. This does not include mobile subscribers.

The director said Bhutan was able to achieve these remarkable achievements also due to assistance from the government of India and other donor countries and agencies.

By Tenzing Lamsang

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